



School Boards Advocate Toolkit



Table of Contents

Introduction to this Toolkit	3
Managing your Relationship with School/Governing Boards	
• School/Governing Boards 101	4
• Get to know your School/Governing Board	6
School Board Etiquette	
• Attending meetings	11
• Speaking at a meeting	11



Introduction: Advocating to School Boards

This toolkit will help you reach out to your school board to educate them on the importance of arts education in Arizona.

Elected officials from all levels of government repeatedly stress how important it is that they and their staffs receive information about the need to pass policy, funding and more. During this economic crisis we must work harder than ever to secure funding for arts education in Arizona. Your school board needs to hear from you.

Speaking with elected officials to educate them on a particular issue or to impact their views on policy decisions that affect the lives of the people they represent is a right and responsibility of people in a democracy. We all have the power to affect change in our government.

This toolkit is focused on school boards in Arizona. We hope that the information within will help you use your voice for arts education in Arizona.

5 Steps to Effective Advocacy

1. Educate yourself
2. Educate your elected officials/Meet your elected officials
3. Attend school board meetings regularly
4. Actively participate as a constituent and meet with elected officials
5. Repeat



Managing your Relationship with School Boards

City Councils 101

What is a School or Governing Board?

A school board is the governing body for a school district.

Requirements for School/Governing Board members

- Be elected by the voters in the district or be appointed by the county superintendent of schools.
- Reside within the legal boundaries of the school district and have lived in the district for at least one year immediately preceding the day of election.
- Be a registered voter.
- Board members cannot be, or have a spouse who is, an employee of the district when assuming office or during the term of office.
- Board members cannot serve simultaneously on more than one school district governing board.
- The position is unpaid, though some expenses may be reimbursed.
- School board members have no individual authority over school matters. The authority of a board member includes expressing an opinion and casting a vote as a part of the governing board in a board meeting.

What Do School/Governing Board Members Do?

School board members are responsible for broad, futuristic thinking, minute analysis and decisive action in all areas that affect students and staff in their schools. Some roles and responsibilities are implicit. Others are specifically mandated or allowed by Arizona law. Everything board members do is focused on providing the best education possible for the children in their community.

Set the Direction

The governing board, with extensive involvement from the staff and community, is responsible for envisioning the future of the public schools in their community. After setting the vision and mission for the district, the governing board works collaboratively to establish strategic goals to move the organization toward the community's vision for its schools.

Establish the Structure

Board policies and goals establish the structure and create the environment for ensuring that all students are served. The superintendent uses the structure established by the board to manage operations on a day-to-day basis. Although the superintendent may suggest changes to policies, only the board as a whole has the legal authority to adopt policy.

Provide Support

The board provides support to its organization by ensuring that resources are adequate and aligned to meet established goals. Support also is provided by recognizing and encouraging excellence throughout the organization.



Ensure Accountability

As the community's representative in the local schools, the board is responsible for ensuring that the schools are well run – that resources are used wisely and that high standards for academic performance are set. The board as a whole needs to monitor performance to meet established goals – academic, financial and operational.

Advocate for Students

One of the board's most important roles is to be the ambassador for public education in the community. As individuals, each board member can help communicate the ways in which their local schools are supporting student educational needs, parent and community aspirations, and state and federal standards. Together, the board also can demonstrate that an atmosphere of collaboration and respect is the most conducive environment for providing the best education for children in the community.

Specific Duties

Specific duties of school boards may relate to employment, purchasing, budget preparation, students and policies. They may include:

- Hiring and evaluating the district superintendent.
- Providing guidance in the development of the budget to ensure funding needed to meet board established goals.
- Approving the budget.
- Monitoring the budget.
- Setting salaries for employees.
- Approving purchases.
- Establishing and approving policies.
- Approving curriculum materials.
- Adopting the school calendar.
- Reviewing regulations for compliance with policy.
- Approving personnel actions based on the superintendent's recommendation.
- Closing or constructing schools.
- Assessing board effectiveness.
- Monitoring progress toward goals.

Mandatory duties of school boards are defined in A.R.S. §15-341. Discretionary powers are defined in A.R.S. §15-342.)

What School Board Members and Boards DON'T Do

School board members DON'T:

- Implement policy; school boards make policy and superintendents carry it out.
- Manage the day-to-day operations of the school district; school boards see to it that the district is managed by professionals.
- Evaluate staff, other than the superintendent, nor do they become involved in employment interviews, other than those for superintendent.
- Decide how much money is allocated to their school district



Get to know your School/Governing Board members

Why should you get to know and meet with your School/Governing Board? An in person meeting with School/Governing members is just the first step in building a relationship. If the people, who represent you, know and respect you, they are more likely to be open to your ideas and opinions.

Do your research

Many school districts have websites which make it easy for you to research and learn more about your School/Governing Board members. Before asking for a meeting or engaging members in conversation you should know who you are talking to, what they stand for, and how they vote on policy.

One-on-One Meeting

The more local the branch of government the more accessible elected officials are to constituents. After you've done your research and know who you're talking to, call and ask for an in person meeting. Offer to take the School/Governing Board member to coffee or for a meal (or bring it to them). During this meeting remember to:

- Be polite
- Introduce yourself
- Ask questions to get to know the School/Governing Board member better
- Introduce your area of interest or who/what you represent

Organize a small team of people to go visit your School/Governing Board

After the one-on-one meeting, try to bring a small group of two to four people with you on your visit. When assembling a "team" of constituents, try for diverse representation; people from all walks of life. Diverse groups bring added perspectives, skills and presence that a homogeneous group cannot. Some possible team members to include in your visit:

- Parents
- Educators
- Administrators and arts professionals
- Business leaders
- Community members
- Artists

Setting Up a Meeting with Your School/Governing Board members

There are a number of effective means for scheduling meetings with School/Governing Board members. We recommend the following sequence:

Send a letter, an email or fax requesting a meeting with preferably one month's notice. If there is no response, follow up with a phone call.



Sample Letter/Email/Fax

Date

Attn: (Name of Scheduler, if known)

The Honorable/Dr./Mr./Mrs. (Name)

[Use local address]

FAX

Ms./Mr. (Name of scheduler):

I am writing to request an appointment for several constituents and I, to speak with School Board member [Name] to discuss the arts in Scottsdale Unified Schools and the need to arts education for all students.

We are requesting a meeting in [month]; my preference would be for [day of the week], [month, day and year], but we can certainly be flexible for School Board member's schedule.

Those in attendance at the meeting, depending on when it is scheduled for, will be:

- Name, title and address for each attendee
- Name, title and address for each attendee

Please let me know when the School Board member might be available. I will follow up with you in a few days if I have not heard back.

Thank you,

(Your name)

(Your address)

(Your Telephone Number)

(E-mail address)

If you do not hear from them, follow up by phone. You may need to be persistent in following-up until an actual meeting is confirmed. They are usually not trying to avoid you—they are simply overwhelmed with requests for meetings in an already packed schedule, so keep trying. If you speak to a scheduler, be sure to get her or his name in case you need to call back. Be persistent—it will pay off.

Preparing for Your Meeting

Practice makes perfect. Gather your team in advance, if at all possible, so that you can share information and agree upon strategies for your meeting. Agree on the focus of your meeting with your elected official, how you will introduce yourselves and the basic talking points you intend to cover. Holding a practice session is an excellent idea and will help you feel more confident and prepared for the actual meeting. Because appointments with elected officials are often brief (usually fifteen to twenty minutes), taking the time to prepare carefully will help you use that time wisely to focus on your most important issues.

You may also want to divide up roles for the meeting. It is helpful to have one person designated as the leader, who can guide the introductions, move things along, and be sure that the right questions get asked at the end of the meeting. It is also very useful to have someone take notes of your meeting so you'll remember what has been said.

Dress for Success

Government at the state and local level is a formal institution, so plan to dress professionally for your meeting. Elected officials and their staffs usually will be wearing suits and ties for men, and suits, dress



slacks or skirts, with a blouse or dress sweater for women. You are likely to be taken more seriously if you dress in a similar fashion.

Do you Research and Be an Expert in Your Issue

Research the person you are meeting with. Make an effort to know your elected official's position on the arts, culture and arts education.

Knowing basic facts about your elected officials and their positions can help you establish a connection with them and increase your understanding of what might motivate them to support our cause.

Important points to consider for your meeting

Most elected officials need to be convinced of two things for them to support arts education.

- First, they must understand why arts education is vital to your school district.
- Second, they must be convinced that supporting arts education will be a political win for them come re-election.

The following talking points can aid you in beginning your discussion with your elected officials.

Arts in Arizona

- The arts are an economic driver in Arizona. With almost 50,000 employees state wide, the arts industry is vital to Arizona's future.
- The arts support jobs and provide important tax revenue.
- The arts create a sense of place. A rich and vibrant arts community attracts business in the form of companies and employees.

Arts Education

- Arts Education in K-12 schools teaches our youth to be innovative, not just creative.
- The 21st century economy will be competitive and driven by innovation. Our world faces difficult questions and trials, like the current economic turn down, and it will take innovative ideas and follow through on those ideas to create a stable and democratic future.
- Innovation is and has been the thing that gives America a competitive edge. We live in the greatest country in the world. We have more opportunity to become successful and pursue "life, liberty and happiness" than people of any other time. Our nation's greatness is built on a foundation of innovation and competitive spirit. Our youth must be given the opportunity to learn how to think in innovative ways, or our country faces losing that competitive edge that innovation creates. Already foreign graduate students out number American born graduate students in this country.
- The Arts are an essential part of culture and civilization; we must continue to teach in the Arts in K-12 schools.
- Civilization began with the written word and with painting in primitive forms. If we are to continue to grow as a civilization, we must support Arts Education in K-12 schools.

In addition to these statewide talking points, try to bring 2-3 talking points specific to your school district. It may also be helpful to bring research, surveys or anything that will support your position.



The Day of Your Meeting

- When you arrive, each team member should introduce themselves. Say your name and that you are a constituent, a parent, and educator or anything else that might be important to the School/Governing Board. Note if you have a connection with your School/Governing Board.
- Always be brief and stay on point—your meeting time will be limited, usually twenty to thirty minutes. This is when your team’s preparation pays off. Having your general talking points written up will help you present your information clearly and directly.
- When speaking with your board member the most important thing is talk about personal experiences with arts education. Personal accounts are the most likely to affect your elected official.
- Stay focused so that you will be understood and make your point well since a short, articulate statement will be far more effective than an elaborate story.
- Listen carefully to what your council member has to say; clearly and succinctly answer any questions she or he asks.
- Speak slowly and clearly, without using jargon, slang, acronyms, abbreviations or terms that other people may not understand.

Sample Introductions:

Good afternoon, School/Governing Board Member Smith. My name is Robert Jones, and I am a lifelong resident of our city, as you are, and attended Mesa Public Schools. I am a small business owner in Mesa. I very much appreciate this opportunity to talk with you about arts education in Mesa.

- Speak positively about arts education and how it has benefit you and your family. Make your own position clear and let it speak for itself.
- If you do not know something, do not make it up. Explain that you do not know the answer and offer to follow up with the information. If you do offer this, make sure you really do follow-up.
- A simple leave behind that covers the important facts is important. AzCA may be able to help you find research for a leave behind.

Remember that most appointments are brief. Leave gracefully when your time is up and be careful not to overstay your welcome. If you are invited to stay longer, by all means do so if you have the time.

After the Meeting

Each visitor should send a thank you note immediately—this is a quick and easy way to further your relationship with your council member. If you also met with someone on the staff, write them a separate thank you note as well. Be sure to follow up as soon as possible with any promised additional information.

Sample Thank You Letter

Date
The Honorable/Dr./Mr./Mrs. [First and Last name]
[Your City] City Council
City, State and Zip

Dear School/Governing Board Member (Last name):



Thank you for taking the time to meet with us on [date] to discuss arts education in [insert name of School District here]. We appreciate your time and attention to this issue that is of vital importance to our school district.

As we discussed in the meeting,

- Arts education is vital to the future success of our students.
- Arts education is a core subject area that should be funded in parity with other core academic subjects
- Weighting of arts education AP classes should be on par with other AP courses

[If applicable] Thank you for your support of arts education.
If you have any further questions, please feel free to be in touch with me.

Thank you,
(Your name)
(Your address)
(Your Telephone Number)
(E-mail address)

Report the Results of Your Visit

The information you gather in your meeting is critical to our efforts to build state wide support for the arts and arts education. Please contact AzCA/AA at 602-253-6535 after your meeting.



School/Governing Board Etiquette

Attending School/Governing Board Meetings

Attend in Person, Often

In order to be a highly effective advocate at the School/Governing Board level, you must regularly attend the School/Governing Board meetings. While it is impractical for most of us, as individuals, to attend every School/Governing Board meeting, it is far more reasonable for a small group of people to attend School/Governing Board meetings on a rotating basis.

Create a School/Governing Board meeting calendar and create a rotating schedule for each member of your cohort to attend one meeting in an appropriate time span.

For example: The Peoria Unified School District meets twice a month. There are 8 members of the Peoria Arts Education Parent cohort. Each member will attend one meeting every four months. Make the calendar public, share it with your cohort, and make sure that you establish an accountability structure to ensure that your cohort has one representative at every meeting.

When Should More Than One Representative Attend?

There are times when you will want to activate your cohorts membership and network to attend School/Governing Board meetings. You may want to do this when:

- A budget decision is up for discussion that affects arts education
- A policy is being discussed that affects arts education
- There is a crisis that affects education

Speaking at a School/Governing Board Meeting

Know the Chambers Procedures

Every meeting or convening has its own protocol and procedures. Be absolutely sure that you and your cohort understand the protocol and procedures for your School/Governing Board.

- Know how to sign up to speak
- Know how to address your School/Governing Board
- Speak concisely and politely
- Answer any questions
- Thank the School/Governing Board for their time and attention