

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ACTION CENTER



**BUILDING AMERICA'S FUTURE IN
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**



**2016 VOTER
ENGAGEMENT
GUIDE**



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the National School Boards Action Center Voter Engagement Guide. This guide aims to provide the information and resources local school board members and public education advocates need to effectively advocate for candidates and lawmakers to prioritize K-12 public education during and after this historic election. We hope that this guide will help you continue to engage local, state and federal stakeholders, and also to develop the next generation of advocates.

WHO WE ARE

The [National School Boards Action Center \(NSBAC\)](#) is a not-for-profit organization founded by the [National School Boards Association \(NSBA\)](#) to actively advocate on behalf of our nation's 90,000 local school board members, who are responsible for serving 50 million public school students.

Through NSBAC's "[Building America's Future in Public Schools](#)" national election campaign, its "[Friends of Public Education](#)" network has been actively advocating for presidential candidates, Members of Congress and other policymakers to Take Action in support of public education.



WHY YOU SHOULD GET INVOLVED

In light of this election year, NSBAC calls on our nation's local school board members and all public education advocates to implement community engagement initiatives that will help advance and promote NSBAC's "[Building America's Future in Public Schools](#)" national election campaign. This voter engagement guide has been designed to support and expand your ability to ACT and ADD YOUR VOICE as we advocate for local governance and community ownership, and inform the public about the importance of public education in America's future.

Now through the November election and the new year, all education advocates are asked to join NSBAC in its efforts to mobilize advocates to take action to ensure federal policy supports and strengthens the nation's public schools by doing the following:

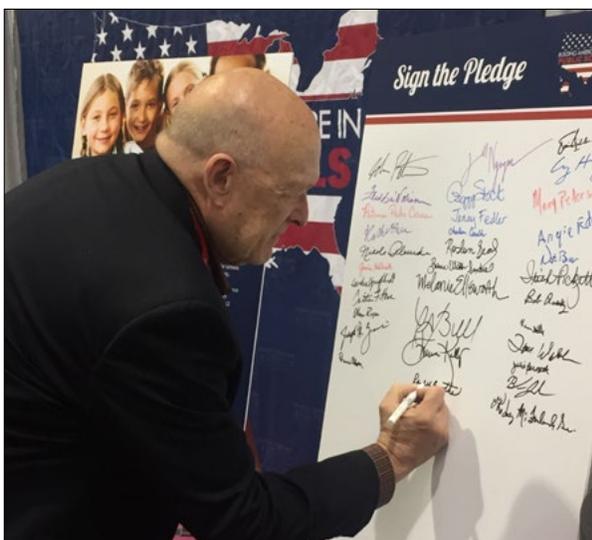
- **ACT** to expand the number and effectiveness of public education advocates through NSBAC's [Friends of Public Education network](#).
- **ADD YOUR VOICE** by amplifying our message and public education policy priorities through the use of [NSBAC's Campaign Action Center](#), grassroots strategies and social media tools to engage advocates and inform policymakers.



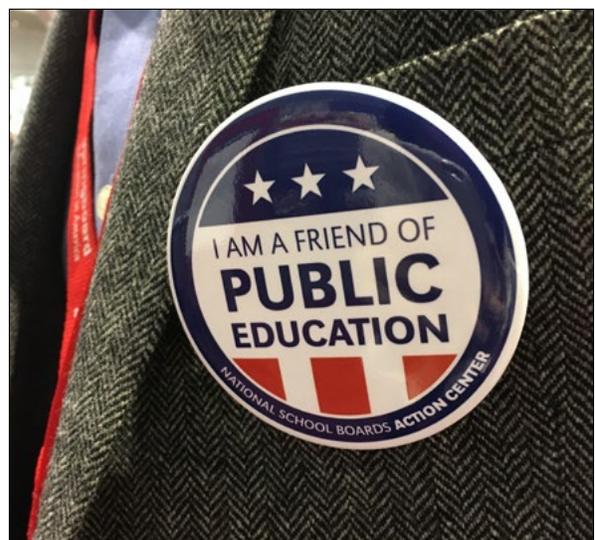
GRASSROOTS STRATEGIES

GRASSROOTS ACTIVITIES URGING SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

NSBAC's "[Building America's Future in Public Schools](#)" is a grassroots engagement campaign that can empower your advocacy effort. By engaging in the following activities, you will help advance the campaign's goal to ensure that congressional candidates, elected officials, voters and other members of the local community are informed about the importance and benefits of public education. More importantly, your action will help you win your candidates' support for sound education policy and build coalitions to rally support for public education.



Sign the [Petition](#) to urge our next President to support public education!



Become a [Friend of Public Education! Join Now!](#)

1 KNOW YOUR CANDIDATES

Research your candidates' backgrounds and positions to help you better engage them on the importance of public education. There are many open resources, including [NSBAC's website](#) you can tap into to get more information. Visit the candidates' websites to find out what education issues are important to them.

- Find out who donated to your candidates' campaigns to assess what special interest may be in play. Go to the [Center for Responsive Politics](#).
- Check out how incumbents voted on key education issues. Go to [NSBAC's Congressional Voting Records](#); and [Presidential Candidates' Positions on Public Education](#).
- Visit the candidates' Twitter and Facebook pages to gauge what issues are being discussed. Sign up to "follow" them on social media so you can get updates on your feeds.
- Attend local campaign events in person to introduce yourself and get to know campaign staffers.

2 PARTICIPATE IN LOCAL TOWN HALL MEETINGS/ CANDIDATES FORUMS

These events provide great opportunities for you and other public school supporters to put education on the candidates' agendas. You can also submit your education questions on social media to be considered for the nationally televised presidential debates. These debates often partner with Twitter or Facebook to encourage audience participation.

- Attend the event with other public education advocates to maximize the chances of asking a question.
- Prior to the forum, develop a list of specific questions on key education issues.
- Get to the point. Vague questions give candidates a chance to get off subject. Try to get candidates to go on record. Get question ideas from [NSBAC's Congressional Candidate Survey](#).

③ BUILD COALITIONS

There are more ways than ever to reach out to members in your community to raise awareness about the importance of public education in this election. Tapping into your community groups and network is a great way to start. Consider using technology to broaden your reach and keep your contacts connected and engaged regularly.

- If you are a parent, partner with your school districts and parent and teacher groups (PTAs), to amplify your message. Reach out to the business community and civic organizations and share what's at stake in this election for public school children.
- Galvanize public support and drive action among your network through emails, social media, blogs, newsletters and mobile channels. Keep people informed and engaged on a regular basis.
- Send specific questions on education to voter groups, such as the [League of Women Voters](#) to use for candidate public forums or in candidate questionnaires.
- Become a "[Friend of Public Education](#)" through NSBAC to get updates on key education issues and connect with advocates across the country.

④ WORK WITH THE MEDIA

All politics is local. When you express your opinion to the local media, your candidates are likely to pay attention. Consider using all types of media including print, digital, local cable and radio networks. These are the places from which local voters likely get their information and updates. Chances are, a local education story could sprout into a national issue that can garner much broader attention.

- Write an opinion editorial (op-ed) or a letter-to-the-editor for your local newspaper explaining why public education is an important issue for the election. Send copies of your published commentary to the candidates.
- Put a human face on your article by sharing a local story or your experience with local public schools.
- Visit the [NSBAC website](#) for talking points on key public education issues.

Grassroots Tips for School Board Members

As an elected or appointed school board member, you are uniquely positioned to influence policy decisions through grassroots engagement because you are involved in politics and serve the same constituents as your federal and state legislators. Also, you have access to public forums that are not available to everyone, such as parent/teacher groups and the local media. Consider the following activities:

- Invite candidates to visit your schools
 - Invite the local media to join the school visit.
 - Provide photo opportunities for the candidates during the visit.
 - Write to the candidates after the visit to thank them and continue to seek commitment on issues that are important to your schools.

- Work with local media to bring attention to education issues facing your district
 - Plan a media event with the candidates.
 - Meet with newspaper editorial boards to discuss what the candidates can do to address the challenges facing your schools.
 - Take advantage of all media outlets including local/community cable networks.

- Position yourself as a resource on education for the candidates and their transition teams. You are in the best position to understand what is happening in your schools. Use that expertise to help the candidates get familiar with education issues.
 - Before the election, assemble a group of school district experts to brief the candidates and their campaign staff on issues.
 - Offer yourself as a resource over the course of the election season and after the election.

ONLINE ADVOCACY

Political engagement today is highly social and takes place in real time. Using social media can give you an edge in amplifying your advocacy for public education in this election season. Elected officials are using social media to gauge public opinions. A Congressional Management Foundation survey found that between one and 30 comments on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were sufficient to get congressional staff's attention.



TWITTER

This is a great way to reach people outside your usual circle. It allows you to send and read text -like posts – tweets – of up to 140 characters. Twitter has 320 million active users monthly. A majority of the U.S. House of Representatives are on Twitter and so are most of the U.S. Senators.

- Once you have a Twitter account, follow [@NSBActioncenter](#) (the [National School Boards Action Center](#)) and [@NSBAComm](#) (the [National School Boards Association](#)) to get the latest information and developments on key education issues on your timeline.
- Retweet NSBAC's and NSBA's messages to your followers to stay connected.

SAMPLE TWEETS



Petition the presidential candidates today to help keep our public schools strong. **#EdVote16 #education**
bit.ly/1S4g9Rg



Become a Friend of Public **#Education**, speak up for public schools in **#election2016 #EdVote16**
bit.ly/2crsvUV



Congress: pls act on critical **#education** issues **#ESSA impl. #CTE #CNR2016 #edfunding #EdVote16**
bit.ly/2bQJCha

- Include hashtags (#) in your messages to broaden your reach to people who are tweeting about specific topics. Hashtags are words prefixed with a “#” sign for grouping posts together by topic. Some common hashtags for education are:
 - #education
 - #k12
 - #EdVote16
 - #ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act)
- Use photos, infographics and videos to boost engagement.
- Twitter conversation is a two-way street. Join topics and discussions with others. The more you are engaged with the K-12 education community, the more your voice can be heard.

2 FACEBOOK

Facebook’s effect can be far-reaching with more than 1.5 billion active users across the world. It allows you to create a profile and communicate with others, as well as create pages to advocate for your issues. Many members of Congress and candidates have public profiles on Facebook and monitor online activities regularly.

- Once you have a Facebook account, engage with [NSBAC](#) and [NSBA](#) by “liking” their pages. That way you will get regular updates on education issues in your news feed.
- Visit the profiles of your members of Congress and candidates to see what issues are being discussed.
- Post the successes and challenges of your local public schools on your profile page to raise awareness of the importance of public education.
- Create sustained conversations by encouraging others to comment on your posts and responding to others’. Ask a question from time to time to spur discussion of issues important to your local schools.
- Use images, videos and infographics whenever possible.
- Explore other Facebook applications, try to set up an issue-specific page to rally support and share information with others.

SAMPLE FB POSTS

 Nine in 10 school-age children in America attend public schools. We need to keep the pressure on to make public education a priority for the new Congress and next President. Speak up by taking action now! <http://actnow.io/ppkOgkB>

 Become Friends of Public Education, speak up for public schools in the 2016 elections! <http://actnow.io/qMP9BjZ>

 **Congress:** Please act on the following issues critical for our public school students:

- Continue Congressional oversight of ESSA implementation;
 - Reauthorize Carl D. Perkins Career & Technical Education Act;
 - Reauthorize Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act; and
 - Maximize education investments for programs for disadvantaged kids, such as Title I and special education.
- www.nsbac.org

3 MOBILE ADVOCACY

The Pew Research Center reported in 2014 that 90 percent of all Americans had a mobile phone, and two-thirds used their phones to go online. The popularity of mobile phones makes them a great tool for advocacy.

- Use text messaging to share your advocacy effort, NSBAC's messages and calls to action.
- Consider using a mobile short code (keyword) for your organization to mobilize action by texting to your network.
- Use text messaging strategically to maximize effectiveness.

Tips on meeting with Members of Congress

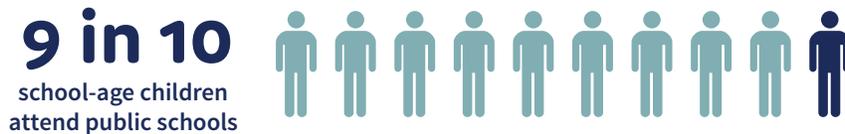
While Congressional meetings take the most amount of work to prepare and accomplish, a face-to-face meeting allows you to make a personal appeal directly to the Member and their staff. The following tips apply to meeting with current and future Members of Congress.



- Call or email the Member's office to request a meeting with the Member or the staff person that handles the issue. Be clear and concise in your request so the office can identify the right staff person if the lawmaker is not available.
- Read over relevant materials/talking points on the issues (go to [NSBA legislative priorities](#)). You don't need to be an expert, just have a good understanding of the issue and what you are seeking from Congress.
- Find out what Congress is doing on the issue you want to discuss and whether the lawmaker is on a committee that addresses the issue.
- Use a personal example to make your point: how the issue impacts your school district, state or school.
- Be clear and direct in stating your purpose at the meeting. Ask the lawmaker to support your position.

FIVE THINGS TO CELEBRATE ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION

- 1 PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE STILL THE SCHOOL OF FIRST CHOICE**
For all the talk of vouchers, education savings accounts, and homeschooling, close to nine in 10 school-age children attend public schools.

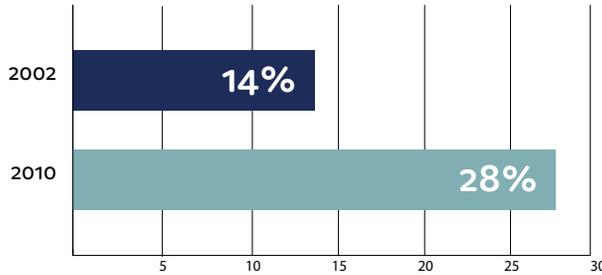


- 2 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES AT ALL TIME HIGH**
Research shows that high school graduation rates hit historic highs, especially due to the gains in achievement of African-American and Latino students who both improved their rates by 7 and 12 percentage points, respectively, between 2008 and 2012. The U.S. Department of Education calculated that 81 percent of the class of 2012 graduated on time. Research shows that two-thirds of new grads are enrolling in college.



3 HIGH-QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN

The expansion of state-funded pre-kindergarten was one of the great education stories of the 2000s. Between 2002 and 2010, the number of 4-year-olds in state-supported programs doubled from 14 percent to 28 percent. At the same time, the quality of these programs increased.



Percentage of 4-year-olds in state-supported programs

4 ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The proportion of English language learners (ELL) in the nation's schools has more than doubled from 4 percent in 1998 to the current 10 percent. Over this time period, reading performance of ELL 4th-graders rose 15 points on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which translates to about one and a half years of additional learning.



Over 18 years, ELL reading performance rose

15 points on NAEP

5 MODERNIZED CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Public schools are offering students CTE programs that are increasingly integrated with high-level academics alongside hands-on training in growing occupations led by health services, IT, communications and design. In 2009, nearly nine in 10 high school graduates had earned at least one CTE credit.

Nearly **9** in **10** high school graduates had earned at least

1 CTE credit



Source: [Center for Public Education, NSBA](#)

KEY PUBLIC EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES AND TALKING POINTS

EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA): IMPLEMENTATION AND CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

The work of the National School Boards Association's legislative governing body, the Delegate Assembly, informed the development of provisions to support local governance in the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), now known as the "*Every Student Succeeds Act*" (ESSA). Now that the education law has been reauthorized, NSBAC will continue to advocate for Congress to use its oversight authority to ensure that the U.S. Department of Education incorporates feedback from local school board members and other education stakeholders during the ESSA implementation process.



TALKING POINTS

- As the U.S. Department of Education continues to draft proposed rules and guidance during the implementation of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), members of Congress should urge agency officials to uphold the local governance structure and meaningfully engage local school board members in accordance with the intent and spirit of the law.



In December 2015, President Obama signed the updated *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) into law. The law preserves accountability for education of disadvantaged students, while restoring much of the design and implementation strategies to the states and local districts.

- The *Every Student Succeeds Act's* inclusion of local governance provisions presents a significant opportunity for lawmakers to work with policymakers as we all work together to develop innovative programs that address the unique needs of each school district and respective community, including programmatic flexibility for school districts, and recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers and school leaders.

CARL D. PERKINS CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION REAUTHORIZATION

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the "*Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act*" (H.R. 5587) by a vote of 405 to 5. Introduced by Representatives Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA) and Katherine Clark (D-MA), the legislation aligns CTE with provisions for college and career readiness in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA); encourages greater public-private partnerships among school districts, employers and institutions of higher education; increases opportunities for apprenticeships and credentialing; retains current formula grant



funding; and, strengthens support for career guidance and academic counseling, as well as professional development for educators. H.R. 5587 modernizes Career and Technical Education (CTE) to equip our students with the academic and workforce skills they need to compete for high-skilled, in-demand jobs.

The U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) is drafting a companion bill that is expected to be announced soon.



TALKING POINTS

- CTE has not been reauthorized since 2006; and, as our school districts work to implement the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), alignment of CTE programs will be integral to strengthen curricula and support for college and career readiness.
- Urge your U.S. Senators to pass a CTE bill that would help school districts and local/ regional economies promote sustainable relationships among education, business, and other community stakeholders to help address what a number of employers have cited as a "skills gap".

CHILD NUTRITION ACT

School districts and each of our nation’s schools are on the front lines of serving lunch and breakfast to 30 million children daily. Some districts have struggled to meet new standards and other requirements since 2010. Although the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act* expired on September 30, 2015, schoolchildren will continue to receive school meals as long as federal funds are available.



The U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 5003) and the U.S. Senate (*Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act* (no bill number)) have each introduced legislation to reauthorize school lunch and breakfast and other nutrition programs. NSBAC supports both bills with reservations as they would: 1) increase flexibility for school districts and 2) increase the school board perspective in federal administration of the programs. However, both bills would also increase administrative burden via new eligibility verification requirements.



TALKING POINTS

- School districts are critical partners in the effort to assure a healthy and positive learning environment for children to achieve their full potential.
- The *Child Nutrition Act* reauthorization is an opportunity to affirm local leadership, and support my school district. [Describe how your district serves children].

FUNDING: FISCAL YEAR 2017 EDUCATION INVESTMENTS

On July 14, the House Appropriations Committee passed its [Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill](#), which would prioritize investments for Title I programs for disadvantaged students and special education grants to school districts and states under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). Under the measure, approximately \$2 billion is proposed for increases in Title I, IDEA, and new Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants under Title IV of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). The Senate Appropriations Committee [reported its bill](#) for FY2017 education investments on June 7, which would also provide targeted investments in K-12 programs, including a proposed increase of \$500 million for Title I programs.



It is also possible that Congress may consider a Continuing Resolution (CR) to maintain government operations, rather than a full-year appropriations bill this fall. The federal fiscal year for 2017 begins October 1, 2016.



TALKING POINTS:

- The bipartisan support from both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to increase investments in key programs for our students is welcomed.
- Our school districts are working diligently to ensure effective implementation of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA); and, the concerted effort in Congress to provide appropriations commensurate with this leading priority for our schools is needed to strengthen student achievement.
- Urge your Member (s) of Congress to ensure that the \$500 million increase proposed for special education grants (under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* –IDEA) will be retained in a final appropriations bill.

RESOURCES

[Schedule of Presidential Debates](#)

[NSBAC's Building America's Future in Public Schools petition](#)

[NSBAC's Congressional Candidate Survey](#)

[Voter registration and candidates look-up](#)

[NSBAC's Campaign Action Center](#)

[Presidential candidates' positions](#)

[Fact check on party education platforms](#)

[114th Congressional Voting Records](#)

[The National School Boards Association legislative priorities](#)

[@NSBActioncenter](#)

[NSBAC Facebook page](#)