

# ***SHOW THEM WHAT IT TAKES***

## **Project**



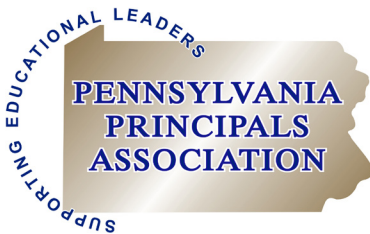


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# ***SHOW THEM WHAT IT TAKES*** Project



## Legislator School Visits

### The ***SHOW THEM WHAT IT TAKES*** Project

On behalf of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units, the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators and the PA Principals Association we invite you to show your legislator that our schools work for students, communities and the economy. Public education works when it has the resources required to give all students the tools and opportunities they need to succeed.

Every child deserves a safe, inviting school that has class sizes small enough for students to receive personal attention, a full range of courses from English, math, science and social studies to music and art, up-to-date books and technology, special education for children with disabilities, career and technical opportunities, guidance counselors to help students with personal, academic and career decisions, and so much more.

Across Pennsylvania, community and school leaders, along with teachers, are working hard to make that vision of school a reality for every child across the commonwealth. The good news is that schools in many places are offering students the kind of environment and educational opportunities that give them the best shot at a successful future.

We also know that the state's failure to adequately invest in public education means that not every school can offer all children the opportunities they need and deserve. Even when we have great school leaders, inspired teachers and a committed community, opportunities for children come up short when we don't adequately fund our schools.

If we are to persuade our state legislators that it's time for them to make the necessary investment in public education, we need them to understand the progressive things happening in our schools and the challenges that hold our students back from not receiving everything they require.

For legislators to understand this, we need to *show them what it takes* to provide all the components of a successful educational experience.

The *Show Them What It Takes Project* has the following strategy:

- Legislators will be invited to visit schools within their legislative district.
- Visits will be designed so that legislators can observe firsthand, the dedication to student success, made by school leaders and classroom teachers.
- The visits will be designed so that legislators can:
  - Observe that all schools need greater state investment in education;
  - Understand what schools have in terms of the tools and opportunities currently available to students; and
  - Create a lasting bond between the school and themselves

On behalf of PSBA, PAIU, PASA and the PA Principals Association, we thank you for your willingness to be a part of the *Show Them What It Takes* project.

# Steps to Planning a ***SHOW THEM WHAT IT TAKES*** School Visit

The most important objective is to show your legislator examples of programs your school provides students and have them observe areas where tools and/or programs are absent due to lack of state funding.

**You should start planning** by considering what school activities, classrooms and/or programs that you can show – in action – to your legislator that will best communicate the breadth and depth of opportunities available to your students. We include sample agendas in this toolkit to assist you in developing ideas for your legislator visit.

While the specific objective has been defined, there are some basics for planning any legislator visit to your school:

## **Right Away:**

Coordinate the date, time and site for the event with your school district, while working with your legislator's aide to determine what days and times would be best. Pennsylvania's General Assembly is generally in session Monday through Wednesday, allowing most legislators time in their home districts on Thursday and Friday.

- Make sure there is ample parking and A/V equipment hookup available at your site.
- Your event should be no longer than 90 minutes.
- Send invitations to legislators. Ideally, the legislator should receive a personal invitation from the superintendent or school district official who has a personal connection to the legislator.
- Confirmation of details needs to be sent to the superintendent and school principal(s).
- Work with the school to provide lunch or refreshments, if holding an event where that would be applicable.
- The superintendent should invite school board members.
- Make every effort to include students in the event.
- Follow the invitations with a personal phone call and a confirmation letter, once confirmed. This should also be done with the local office.
- Make copies of materials to distribute at the event.



## **One to Two Weeks Before the Event:**

- Work with the school district to develop talking points and/or scripts for the event and the order in which people will speak. Include introductions for legislators. For biographical information about legislators, click on [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us). Conduct a dry-run of the event with event coordinators.
- We advise that this event not be open to outside media, and that your school news be invited to cover the event. The more student-centered this event can be, the more authentic the experience for the legislator.
- Arrange to have someone at the event to take pictures and post on social media. Make sure the legislator gets copies of pictures as well.
- Follow up with the caterer for the luncheon/refreshments to confirm food plans for event.
- Call legislators to confirm their attendance a few days before the event.
- Coordinate with the school district to provide nametags for guests and speakers.
- Confirm parking for guests.
- Create a sign-in sheet.

## **The Day of the Event:**

- Coordinate with the school district/school building regarding entrance and approval for individuals attending the event.

## **Immediately After the Event:**

- Send personal thank-you letters to all those who helped with preparation for the event.
- Send thank-you letters to all public officials and reiterate your key messages and “asks.”
- Provide feedback to PSBA by emailing Jamie Zuvich at [Jamie.Zuvich@psba.org](mailto:Jamie.Zuvich@psba.org) to keep us informed of reactions and comments from any legislators at your event. Include any tips or lessons learned for us to share with others who are planning legislative events.

## **Other Ideas:**

- Write an article about the event and include photos. Send a copy of the article to the legislator along with any photos he or she may be able to use in his or her own newsletters. If the school newspaper is involved, staff can perform this important follow-up.
- Report to the school board about the success of the visit.

# Sample ***SHOW THEM WHAT IT TAKES*** Invitation

(Date)

Dear (Representative Doe or Senator Doe):

On behalf of the *(Event sponsor or name of school district)*, I am writing to invite you to learn more about our school district by (participating in our civics class, reading to x class, attending our special education life skills class, agriculture program, etc...) on *(time and date)*. This will be an excellent opportunity for you to see and hear some of the remarkable things the students at *(school in the school district)* are doing, and to sit down with school administration and board members afterward to answer any questions you may have concerning the district.

Every child deserves a safe, inviting school that has class sizes small enough for students to receive personal attention, a full range of courses from science to music and art, up-to-date books and technology, special education for children with disabilities, career and technical opportunities, guidance counselors to help students with academic achievement, career and social/emotional development, and so much more.

At (school or district) we work hard every day to achieve this vision of school for our students. We hope you will come away from your visit with a better understanding of what it takes to ensure all children have the opportunities they need for a successful future. Please join us and see the opportunities we can offer to our students with the current level of funding provided by the state.

At this event, you will have the chance to visit with students and teachers, by spending time (in our civics class, reading to x class, attending our special education life skills class, agriculture program, etc.). They will share with you their experiences in the school and our community.

During this event, we would also welcome your thoughts on your experience with public education. We want to provide you with as many answers as we can during your visit.

I will follow up with a call to your office next week to learn of your availability. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in advance for considering our invitation. We look forward to having you as our special guest.

Sincerely,

(name) (title)

# Sample Event Agenda

Length of program: 90 minutes maximum  
When: October to April  
Participants: Legislators and their staff, superintendent, board members, teachers, students

## Goals for the event:

- For legislators to understand the need for increased investment in public schools.
- For legislators to see the opportunities available to students.
- To further improve the relationship between you, the school district and the legislator.

## 10 minutes: Introduction

- Superintendent and principal provide welcome comments, recognize legislators and thank them for attending your event.
- Superintendent briefly provides an explanation of the school district and its goals, followed by an overview of the school district's numbers – you can use the PSBA profiles or something similar.
- Transition to staff and their work on the program that the legislator is about to visit.
  - Staff overview of the program – how many students participate, how many sites, examples of settings, etc....
  - Provide two or three stories about the difference this program makes in students' lives.
  - Note some of the things that a legislator should notice and look for while visiting the classroom.
  - The administrator can explain the possible challenges facing the program and why your school has focused on it.

## 30 minutes: Firsthand Program Experience

- Proceed to interaction with students – civics class, reading to x class, attending your special education life skills class and participating in a skill, agriculture program, science and technology class, etc.
- Give teachers and students the opportunity to present and highlight how their classroom and school has been successful. Provide the opportunity for staff to intermingle with legislators so that questions can be asked naturally, and teachers can touch on what they would need to be even more successful (books, computers, smaller classes, more qualified teachers, advanced classes, college prep, counselors, etc.). Give the students and teachers the opportunity to discuss the challenges they face.
- Take a photo with the legislator, staff and students and post on social media – candid shots are great. It is important that the students and legislator are in the photo.

## 10 minutes: Debrief

- Present the successes of the school district and the challenges.
- Briefly present the overall budget development and any impending decisions that impact the school district.
  - What you would like to be able to provide to your students: AP Classes, extracurricular activities, after school activities,
- Allow **legislators** to comment.
- Take **questions**.
- **Close** the event by thanking participants and legislators for attending. Provide information for follow-up or next steps.

# Sample Outline

- **Welcome** everyone. Recognize legislators and thank them for attending your event.
- Provide an **overview** of the day's agenda. Give background and context about why the event is important.
- Give teachers and students the opportunity to **discuss** how their classroom and school has been successful and what they would need to be even more successful (books, computers, smaller classes, more qualified teachers, advanced classes, college prep, counselors, etc.).
- Allow **legislators** to comment about what efforts are currently happening in the General Assembly or in his or her districts.
- Take **questions**.
- **Close** the event by thanking participants and legislators for attending. Provide information for follow-up or next steps.
- Enjoy the refreshments/luncheon and the discussion on ways the school district could be supported.



# Sample Thank-You Letter

(Date)

Dear (Representative Doe or Senator Doe):

I want to express my sincere appreciation to you for attending the (name of event) earlier this week. It was a tremendous opportunity for us to present to you the efforts of the Pennsylvania public schools. I hope you gained an understanding of the impact our school has on the families in (name the counties served). We hoped you enjoyed seeing some of the great opportunities that are offered to our students and have a greater view of the investments being made in public education. With additional state funding, we would also be able to (insert what more state funding could do for your district).

As we described, (name of) school has been successful in providing (name of) program. We continue to succeed even when facing (x challenge) and (y challenge). We want to continue our relationship with you and hope that after meeting (several first names of the children who were in the program that day) you will keep in touch with me about the status of our school, and any way you can help us continue our positive impact.

I look forward to working with you in the future as we continue our efforts to ensure that every student in Pennsylvania has access to a high-quality education. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions or concerns relating to the (name of school district) and public education in the commonwealth.

Sincerely,

(name) (title)

# Tips for Talking with Your Legislator

*Make this experience beneficial, not confrontational!*

Keeping in mind that your goal is to develop an ongoing personal relationship with your elected representatives, as well as to influence their position on specific issues or bills, here are a few things to remember when speaking to them:

- Know who your legislator is before making initial contact on an issue.
- Find out what legislative committees your legislator serves on.
- Do not be intimidated. Legislators will view you as the expert on the issue.
- Share a personal story from the school district that you are representing to help to make your point.
- They may not be aware of what they do not know about school operations – do not assume that your legislator understands public education. Take the time to educate him or her.
- Know your issue. Provide facts and figures to back up your position. If you need help with issues, do not hesitate to contact PSBA staff.
- Don't debate with a legislator or give ultimatums such as "I won't vote for you if you do not support my position." Respect the legislator's right to disagree with you.
- Know your opposition. Be able to address the objectionable part(s) of the opposition stance directly and effectively, using verifiable examples and statistics.
- Put the legislator at ease by convincing him or her that you are there to serve as an educational resource. **Act like a partner, not an adversary.**
- Be a good listener and hear what your legislator has to say on the issue.
- Be sure to thank the legislator for taking the time to hear your position.
- Once a legislator gives you a commitment, it is acceptable to check back with him or her later. Do not badger him or her with phone calls.
- Do not be disappointed if your legislator cannot attend and sends his or her staff.
- Spend your time working with legislators who haven't made up their minds.
- Be brief, prepared, clear, honest, accurate, persuasive, timely, persistent and grateful.
- Always follow up with a thank-you note and re-emphasize your "asks" and key talking points.
- When your legislator goes the extra mile, consider acknowledging his or her efforts by writing a letter to the editor in your local paper, posting a positive comment on social media or taking other action.