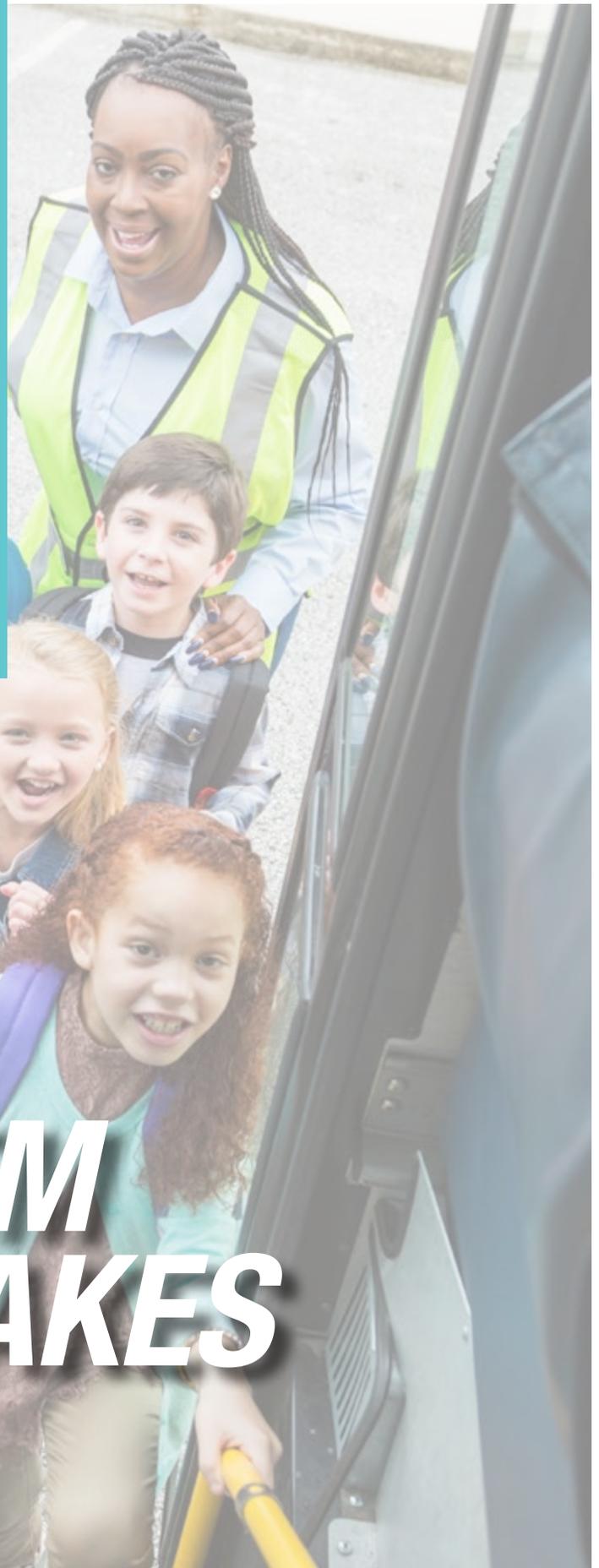


Now is the time to
**SHOW THEM
WHAT IT TAKES**
Project

PROUD LEADERSHIP FOR PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOLS

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>SHOW THEM WHAT IT TAKES</i> project introduction..... | 1 |
| Steps to planning a <i>SHOW THEM WHAT IT TAKES</i> virtual school visit | 2 |
| Sample invitation to legislators | 4 |
| Sample event agenda | 5 |
| Sample event outline | 6 |
| Sample thank-you letter to legislators..... | 7 |
| Tips for talking with your legislator | 8 |



Now is the time to
***SHOW THEM
WHAT IT TAKES***
Project

PROUD LEADERSHIP FOR PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOLS



Legislator Virtual School Visits

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

On behalf of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, and the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators 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, especially during challenging times.

Every child deserves a safe, inviting school where students receive personal attention, a full range of courses, up-to-date books and technology, special education for children with disabilities, career and technical education opportunities, guidance counselors, and so much more.

Across Pennsylvania, school leaders, are working hard to make that vision 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 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.

With the COVID-19 pandemic impacting nearly every facet of their operations, schools are struggling even more to provide for the education, health and safety of students and staff. They need adequate funding, access to reliable broadband connectivity and charter school funding reform among other supports. Now, more than ever, public education needs the support of the General Assembly during this challenging school year. One of the best ways to begin a conversation is to invite your local legislators into your buildings – virtually – to meet with your school leaders, staff and students.

If we are to persuade our state legislators that now is the 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. You are the connection between your schools and the policymakers whose decisions reach from the halls of the Capitol to the classrooms in your district.

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

- Legislators will be invited to visit schools within their legislative district in-person or virtually through Zoom meetings.

Visits will be designed so that legislators can have meaningful discussions with students, and school administrators and hear 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;
 - Create a lasting bond between the school and themselves; and
 - Educate the legislators so they understand how public education works. Be the voice for your public schools and students.

On behalf of PSBA, and PASA, 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*** Virtual 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. Legislators place a high value on groups and citizens who have built relationships with them.

You should start planning by considering what school activities, classrooms and/or programs you can show – in action – to your legislator that will best communicate the breadth and depth of opportunities available to your students. Inviting your students to participate in the in-person or Zoom meeting, will allow the legislators to hear directly from those who are affected every day. Sample agendas are included 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:

Work with your legislator’s aide and with your PSBA Advocacy Ambassador to determine what days and times would be best, then coordinate the event with your school district. Pennsylvania’s General Assembly is generally in session Monday through Wednesday, allowing most legislators time in their home districts on Thursday and Friday.

- Confirm everyone is comfortable that the event will be held virtually via Zoom or in-person. If Zoom, work with your PSBA Advocacy Ambassador to be sure Zoom meeting information is sent to all individuals. The superintendent should invite school board members.
- Your event should be no longer than 60 minutes.
- Work with your ambassador to send invitations to legislators. Ideally, the legislator should receive a personal invitation from the superintendent, or a school district official who has a personal connection to the legislator.
- Make every effort to include students in the event to share information on a specific topic, theater, arts, student council or athletic program.
- Follow the invitations with a personal phone call and a confirmation letter, once confirmed. This should also be done with the legislator’s local office.
- Prepare any materials to be shared with the legislators office via email prior to the virtual event.

One to Two Weeks Before the Event:

- PSBA will provide you with talking points to highlight legislative avenues through which the legislator can assist the school district.
- 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.
- Call legislators to confirm their attendance a few days before the event.

The Day of the Event:

- Confirm the in-person meeting details or the Zoom link in a confirmation email advising them you are looking forward to your discussion.

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 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) in-person or virtually via Zoom*. 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 where students 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 education 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 this 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 discussing what is important to our students and how opportunities have made an impact on their education experience(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: 60 minutes maximum

When: September 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.

45 minutes: Introduction and program experience

- 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 hear.
 - Staff overview of the program – how many students participate, how many sites, examples of settings, etc....
 - Provide two or three personal stories from students about the difference this program makes in their lives.
 - Note some of the things that a legislator should notice about the program, classroom, etc.
 - The administrator can explain the possible challenges facing the program and why your school has focused on it.

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 participating, Provide information for follow-up or next steps.

Sample Thank-You Letter

(Date)

Dear (Representative Doe or Senator Doe):

I want to express my sincere appreciation to you for participating in 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. Effective storytelling will raise awareness of the issue and make the abstract concrete.
- 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, contact PSBA staff for help.
- 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 participate in your meeting 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.