



What to Say

Parents and other citizens with knowledge about their local public schools are a tremendously effective influence on their legislators. Legislators, in fact, depend on this personal input to understand how state policies are affecting their constituents. When constituents consistently tell their local legislators that K-12 is a top priority, they take that message to legislative leaders.

Before you begin communicating, you need to decide what to say. You need to know what key messages you are trying to get across, who you want to hear them, and how you plan to reach them.

Step 1. Define Your Goal: What are you trying to accomplish?

First, you should establish your overall goal: Are you trying to motivate the community to take action on an issue? Are you advocating for a change in policy or law? Or are you just trying to bring attention to a certain issue? It is important to have a clear goal before you start.

Questions to Ask:

- What is the problem?
- Is there a solution to it? If so, what is it?
- Who makes the decisions?
- Who can help influence the decision-makers?

Step 2. Define Your Audience: Who do you need to communicate with?

Who can make the solution possible? Who do you need to recruit to help you get through to the decision-makers? What do you need to do or say to get the attention of the people most concerned about your issue?

Step 3. Decide How to Communicate: How you communicate depends on who you're trying to communicate with.

Do you want to make calls? Send out newsletters? Hold a community meeting? Write letters to decision-makers? Host a letter writing event? Submit letters to the editor? Hold a news conference or briefing? Host a house party? Once you know who you need to communicate with, generate a list of ways to communicate with them.

Step 4. Define Your Message: What do you want to say?

Once you have defined your goal, target audiences and how to reach them, then you can design the message that you want to get out.

You want your message to be simple and clear. You should point out the problem you are addressing, why your intended audience should be concerned with this problem, and what should be done about it.

Request talking points. Contact your allies and your district's communications office and ask for a list of talking points on the issue. You don't have to agree with everything they have to say, or include their points in your letter, but building on each other's key messages can

help you build strong community support for your schools.

Make your message powerful—persuasive and compelling. Try to create a message that is new and put a human face on it. By humanizing the issue, your issues will have a greater impact on the public than if you just cite statistics.

Finally, make sure your message targets your intended audience. If you're targeting lawmakers, you will use different language than if you're trying to target the community.

Step 5. Pare it down.

The key to Key Messages is to keep them short and straightforward!

Tell Your Story

The community, legislators, school board members and other decision-makers need to hear about what's happening in our schools!

Here's a quick outline that can help you tell your story in a clear and concise way. But don't read from a script. Use this as a guide to prepare. When you tell your story, speak (or write) from your heart!

1. **Introduce your story** (2-3 sentences). Set the stage for your story by providing:
 - Your full name (even if you've been introduced)
 - City or town of residence; and
 - Name and ages of the people in your storyStart by stating your main message. This tells them why you are about to tell them this story!
2. **Tell your story** - CHALLENGE, ACTION, RESULT (4-8 sentences)
 - Explain the CHALLENGE that you face
 - Explain the ACTION that would help you address that challenge
 - Tell what kind of RESULT could be achieved due to the action
3. **Wrap it up!** (3-5 sentences)
 - Tell how your result would benefit other families, the community, the state.
 - State your main message again
 - Tell them what you want them to do about it
 - Say thank you!