



Building a sustainable arts education program at your child's school can be greatly enhanced by developing strong relationships with locally elected public officials. They can help direct funds for arts programs or school renovations and support policies that encourage arts education. When done in coordination with school leadership, these efforts can have a lasting impact. Ideas for building relationships with elected officials appear below.

## 1 INVITE ELECTED OFFICIALS TO VISIT YOUR SCHOOL

Inviting local elected officials to witness the power of arts learning is a great first step in building a relationship and can turn them into strong supporters of arts at your child's school. Work closely with school leadership on scheduling and other considerations, and follow these tips to make a lasting impression:

- ✓ Invite officials to attend an event where they can see firsthand how important arts education is to the school community. Keep in mind that they are busy, so schedule well in advance.
- ✓ Once you get confirmation that the official will be attending, prepare for their visit. Identify a point person to greet elected officials and take them on a tour of the arts event and school grounds.
- ✓ You may want to invite the press to the event (at least a week prior). If so, you will need press releases, talking points, etc. See our media worksheet for more info.
- ✓ Give the elected official an opportunity to meet and address the school community. Introducing them to teachers, principals, kids, and families can help make a memorable experience for all.
- ✓ Remember to follow up and thank them after the event.



- ▶ **Consider issuing a public statement before or after an event with an elected official recognizing their good work and engagement. This can bring positive public attention to the elected official and your cause.**

## 2 VISIT YOUR REPRESENTATIVE

When planning your visit, call your representative a few weeks in advance and assemble a team that can help to get your message across. Be sensitive of the official's time, and don't be offended if they're not available and you meet with a staff member instead. If you can win their support, staff members can be great advocates for you with the official. Here are some ways to make your visit a success:

- ✓ Be familiar with the official's accomplishments and thank them for their work on education-related issues.
- ✓ Be clear and concise. Identify the problem, articulate a solution, and ask for their help and support.
- ✓ Make the experience personal. Share one or two anecdotes about your child's school, arts program, and the important impact that the arts have on your child and the school.
- ✓ Bring relevant materials that help you make your case, but don't bring too many.
- ✓ Thank them for their time. Follow up soon after the meeting to formally thank them again. They will remember your courtesy and be more likely to consider your requests favorably.

### 3 CALL AND WRITE ELECTED OFFICIALS

It's not always feasible to meet with your elected officials in person. However, you can still help maintain a positive relationship by contacting them at appropriate times over the phone, through the mail, email, fax, and/or social media. These are also less time-intensive methods that allow those who cannot attend meetings to voice their support and concerns. Remember:

- ✓ Coordinate contact efforts during budget or election season, before an important vote is held, or at other key times. This can really help get elected officials to support your cause. Be sure to check district rules about engaging candidates around election time.
- ✓ Elected officials are active on social media too! Tweet the latest research on arts education to your elected officials. Post a photo with them on Instagram. Share their messages with your followers when appropriate.

### 4 ASK FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Elected officials often have discretionary money, that can be awarded to schools and community organizations to support in-school or after-school arts programming. These dollars can also help fund a school's "capital" project, such as building a dance studio, restoring an auditorium, or creating a music room. Most of the time, securing these funds requires an application that can be very competitive. When preparing applications:



- ✓ Do your homework. Know exactly what you need, how much it will cost, how many students it will impact, the specific benefits of your project, and how it will reflect well on the elected official.
- ✓ Write a strong proposal that makes your case and is easy to read. Use clear language and bullet points, and highlight the key information mentioned above.
- ✓ Ask parents and other friends of the school to support your request. Encourage them to write or call the appropriate officials to share their support of the proposal request. You can even draft the letter for them or give them talking points.
- ✓ If you are awarded funding, be sure to publicly thank the official and invite them to the school to see tax dollars hard at work!

### 5 WEIGH IN AROUND ELECTION TIME

Come election time, candidates are looking to be more visible in their communities and shore up voter support. This is a great time to invite them to your school or share your passion for arts education and ask for their support. There are restrictions on what schools and parent groups can and can't do around election time so as not to be seen as supporting or opposing a candidate for office. However, you can still work with candidates in a nonpartisan way to advance your goals:

- ✓ Provide all candidates, regardless of political party, with facts and information regarding arts education.
  - ✓ Encourage them to add arts and education to their platform and to talk about them on the campaign trail.
  - ✓ Ask all candidates the exact same questions about arts education and inform them of your plans to publicize their responses so parent voters can compare answers and decide for themselves.
- ▶ **The more supporters you can get to weigh in with the candidates the better. Your goal is to demonstrate that a diverse array of community members support arts education.**

