



How to Engage Your Decision-Makers for Osceola's Public Schools



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How to Engage Your Decision-Makers for Osceola's Schools

Why Engage?

Special interests outside Florida and big corporations have deep pockets, hire full-time lobbyists, and monopolize your legislators' schedules so much they struggle to listen to their constituents. Lobbyists spend their days influencing lawmakers and members of the executive branch to introduce, create, or change laws. Corporations have their own lobbyists who work on behalf of individual companies. Lobbyists for foreign governments and businesses work on behalf of foreign countries. Nonprofit and special interest lobbyists work on behalf of various organizations and causes. Association lobbyists represent industries, trades, and professions. Full-time free-lance lobbyists work on behalf of any clients who hire them.

Osceola Public Schools Fast Facts

- ✓ In 2019, Florida ranked 41st out of 50 states in per student educational expenditures. [Source: Cornman, S.Q., Phillips, J.J., Howell, M.R., and Young, J. (2021). *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: FY 19 (NCES 2021-302)*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved August 19, 2021, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.]
 - Florida = \$9,986
 - United States National Average = \$13,187

- ✓ In **2021**, Florida's Free and Reduced Lunch rate was **63.7%**; Osceola's was **72.1%**. (Source: [Florida Department of Education](#))

- ✓ In **2021**, Osceola received **2.36%** of state education funding but had **2.48%** of Florida's entire student enrollment. (Source: [Florida Department of Education](#))
 - Osceola = 69,308 students; 69,195 Unweighted Full-Time Equivalency (UFTE)
 - Florida = 2,795,691 students; 2,814,129 UFTE

 - Osceola = \$532,078,042, or \$532.0 Million
 - Florida = \$22,508,405,502, or \$22.5 Billion

- ✓ That **0.12%** difference was still **\$25,928,035 or \$26 Million**, that Osceola schools did NOT receive for our students.

Now is the time for Osceola parents, students, and advocates of public education to engage their decision-makers, to act, and to be heard.

Tools for positive change are included in this document.

Ten Smart Steps for Parents, Students, and Others to be Heard

- 1. Find out who your legislators are, their committee assignments, and their positions and voting histories on issues important to you.**

State Representatives

<http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/representatives.aspx>

State Senators

<http://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/>

- 2. Be aware of the legislative calendar and how a bill becomes a law.**

Session Dates

- <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/FileStores/Web/HouseContent/Approved/ClerksOffice/ImportantLegislativeDates.pdf>

- <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Calendar/2021/Session%20Dates%202020-11-18%20162817.PDF>

House Calendars and Schedules

- <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/HouseSchedule/houseschedule.aspx?sui=z3bz bq97drw=->

Senate Calendars and Schedules

- <http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Calendars>

How a Bill Becomes a Law (House)

- [http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Handlers/LeagisDocumentRetriever.ashx?Leaf=HouseContent/opi/Lists/Just for Students/Attachments/4/How an Idea Becomes a Law \(Summary\) Color \(REVAMP\) 2.pdf&Area=House](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Handlers/LeagisDocumentRetriever.ashx?Leaf=HouseContent/opi/Lists/Just for Students/Attachments/4/How an Idea Becomes a Law (Summary) Color (REVAMP) 2.pdf&Area=House)

How a Bill Becomes a Law (Senate)

- <http://www.flsenate.gov/usercontent/publications/2010-2012/idea to law chart.pdf>

- 3. Find and join groups who share your focus and who work for the same goals.**

Examples may include, but are not limited to, the Florida Parent-Teacher Association, Florida Education Association, Fund Education Now, and Whole Child Education, etc.

- 4. Write a letter or e-mail to your legislator.**

Tips for writing an effective letter and an example are included in this document.

5. **Follow-up your letter or e-mail with a phone call to your legislator.**

- ✓ Before you call, plan your message carefully.
- ✓ Organize your thoughts, and make notes to help you keep focus.
- ✓ Discuss only one issue per phone call.

6. **Visit your legislator in person.**

- ✓ If possible, call or write in advance to make an appointment.
- ✓ If your legislator is not available, request to meet with his or her legislative assistant.
- ✓ Before your visit, plan your message carefully.
- ✓ Prepare a one-page fact sheet about your message for your legislator to help him or her remember what you present. The first page of this document includes one example.

General Tips for Visits with Decision-Makers

- Contact your legislator about a particular issue before the Legislature takes action on it.
- Make sure you understand the legislative process to help you express your ideas effectively.
- Explain to your legislator how you think current laws (or a particular bill, if it becomes law) will affect your children, your business, your community, and you.
- Be polite and reasonable, even if you disagree strongly with your legislator.
- Suggest a course of action and offer assistance.
- Keep your message positive, and focus on children.



7. Follow bills in committee, and read how your legislator voted.

- ✓ The Legislative Tracking system allows users to
 - create a free account,
 - subscribe to specific bills and committees and
 - receive automatic updates on any changes to them throughout the legislative process.

Legislative Tracking Sign-Up

- <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/MyHouse/accountpreferences.aspx?newUser=true>

Legislative Tracking Log-In

- <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/MyHouse/login.aspx>

8. Keep writing, calling, and visiting your legislators to keep your message visible.

9. Show your appreciation for lawmakers who listen to you (e.g., thank you notes), and politely express your disappointment with those who do not.

10. Celebrate your victories, and “remember in November.” Vote!



Osceola Legislative Delegation

Contact Person: Ms. Barbara Blasingame
Telephone: (863) 968-5666

Address:
315 Pontotoc Street
Auburndale, FL 33823

Florida House of Representatives

Representative Josie Tomkow
District 39



Josie.Tomkow@myfloridahouse.gov

Capitol Office

209 House Office Building
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 717-5039

District Office

315 Pontotoc Street
Auburndale, FL 33823-3444
District Office Phone: (863) 968-5666

Legislative Assistant: Barbara Blasingame
District Secretary: Robyn Bryant

Representative Fred Hawkins
District 42



Fred.Hawkins@myfloridahouse.gov

Capitol Office

1401 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 717-5042

District Office

1211 12th Street, Suite 2.
Saint Cloud, FL 34769-3713
District Office Phone: (407) 892-0409

Legislative Assistant: Zac Stone
District Secretaries: Mikayla Goetz

Florida House of Representatives (Continued)

**Representative Kristen Arrington
District 43**



Kristen.Arrington@myfloridahouse.gov

Capitol Office

1301 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 717-5043

District Office

3 Courthouse Square, Suite 219
Kissimmee, FL 34741-5440
District Office Phone: (407) 846-5016

Legislative Assistant: Eleanor McDonough
District Secretary: Carla Rivera-Marrero



Florida Senate

**Senator Victor Torres
District 15**



torres.oscar.web@flsenate.gov

Capitol Office

226 Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 487-5015

District Office

101 Church Street, Suite 305
Orlando, FL 34741
District Office Phone: (407) 846-5187

Legislative Assistants: Gladys Ferrer; Alfred Yorston

Osceola County School Board

Terry Castillo, Vice Chair

District 1



Terry Castillo
817 Bill Beck Boulevard
Kissimmee, FL 34744
Phone: (407) 577-5022

terry.castillo@osceolaschools.net

Julius Melendez

District 2



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Jon Arguello

District 3



Mr. Jon Arguello
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Clarence Thacker, Chair

District 4



Mr. Clarence Thacker
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Robert Bass

District 5



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Kissimmee, FL 34744
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robert.bass@osceolaschools.net

Tips for Writing Effective Letters to Decision-Makers

- Type or print your letter legibly.
- Include your correct name, address, and phone number in the heading so that your legislator can respond to you.
- Address letters to members of the Florida House of Representatives as follows:

The Honorable John Doe
(Office address)

- Address letters to members of the Florida Senate as follows:

Senator Jane Doe
(Office address)

- Be certain you spell your legislator's name correctly and use the correct address. If you do not, you could lose your audience.
- Keep letters, email, and faxes brief. Never write more than one page. Concise written correspondence is more likely to grab and keep the reader's attention.
- Identify your issue or opinion at the beginning of the letter. Do not bury your main point under trivial text.
- Focus on one issue per letter.
- Support your opinions with facts. Your letter should inform the reader.
- Avoid abbreviations, acronyms, and technical jargon.
- For more impact, personalize each letter instead of sending the same letter to more than one legislator.
- Sign your name.
- Remember to write thank you letters to state representatives or senators who take a strong public stand in support of public education.

Sample Parent/ Community Member Letter

(Your address)
(Date)

The Honorable (Full name of representative) or Senator (Full name of senator)
(Office address)

Dear Representative or Senator (Last name of legislator),

I am a taxpayer who votes, and I am the parent of a _____ grader at _____ School in your district. I am concerned that my child is not getting a strong public education because the state does not appropriate adequate funds for public schools in Florida, especially Osceola County, and imposes too much standardized testing that limits choices for my child.

Please sponsor and work to pass legislation that makes Florida’s education budget meet and exceed the national average, that returns local control to school boards, and that restores the role of parents to direct their children’s education and future.

Thank you for all that you do on behalf of our state.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

(Your name in print)

Protocol for Face-to-Face Communications with Legislative Staff

DO...

- Relax. They're people too.
- Start off with an email requesting a meeting.
- Follow up in a timely manner. Especially if you're clarifying an issue for them.
- Stay out of the weeds. The details can come later if he or she is interested.
- Ask how you can help the elected official or their staff member.
- Use what you've got. If you already know a staffer in an office, ask them who handles your issue.
- Gain as an ally a close friend of the member of Congress you would like to approach. Sneaky, but effective.
- Spend time rallying stakeholders prior to approaching the legislator.
- Be On Time
- Be professional, transparent and genuine.
- Make the issue relevant and personal to the staffer or legislator.
- Know ahead of time who will oppose your idea and how to respond to it.

Need to contact Hill staffers? Try Knowlegis.

cqrollcall.com/knowlegis



DON'T...

Don't intentionally mislead the staffer — explicitly or implicitly.

Don't refer to the legislator by his/her first name, unless you are a close personal friend.

Don't try and have protracted discussions about policy. They don't have the time.



Mix up the staffer or member's political party. It happens!



Don't try and wine and dine a staffer to "buy" his or her time.



Don't continue to call when an email exchange will work.



Don't go to a meeting without doing your homework first.

Have three double vodkas before you approach a staffer at a party.



Don't take an issue to a member's office if they historically have never supported that issue.



Mention the campaign or donations if you're there to talk about your issue.

Drag on and on about your issue. Or worse, about yourself. You're not that interesting.

Bring up your issue if you meet the member of Congress/staffer in the supermarket. They have a right to be off the clock.



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