



TOOLKIT: HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL LEGISLATOR SCHOOL TOUR



FREEDOM COALITION
FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

Introduction

Welcome to this essential toolkit, designed to prepare school leaders for hosting state legislators on campus. When a lawmaker steps onto your campus, whether it's their first visit or their tenth, it's crucial to leave them with a vivid, positive impression of your school's vital role in the community and the impact it has on the students it serves. Each visit is a golden opportunity to ignite their enthusiasm about the significant contributions your school is making to the community and to their constituents.

This toolkit is your guide to organizing effective and memorable school visits with elected officials. Building and nurturing relationships with state and local representatives is key to enhancing your ability to achieve critical school objectives, such as funding, renewal, and expansion. Moreover, these relationships are instrumental in advancing statewide and national legislative policy priorities.

Inside, you will find:

- **Guidelines on How to Identify and Prepare Spokespeople**
- **A Comprehensive School Visit Checklist**
- **Strategies to Effectively Communicate Your School's Needs and Achievements**

By effectively leveraging this toolkit, you ensure that your school's voice is heard in important educational conversations. This not only contributes to the broader goals of educational excellence but also fosters community development. Use the following questions to identify how you would like your lawmaker to feel at the end of a school visit and what you would like them to remember most. Your answers will assist you in planning a dynamic and unforgettable visit that highlights the best of what your school has to offer.

Note: This is an interactive document, and all hyperlinks are active for your convenience. You can also download this document as a PDF by clicking this link.

Creating a Memorable Visit

Use the following questions to identify how you would like your lawmaker to feel at the end of a school visit and what you would like them to remember most. Your answers will help you plan a dynamic and unforgettable visit.

QUESTIONS

If you asked the lawmaker at the end of the visit how they feel, what two or three emotions would you want your tour to elicit (e.g., excited, hopeful, energized, grateful, enthusiastic, etc.)?

How would you want the lawmaker to describe your school at the end of the visit (e.g. a family/community, a positive culture, laser focused on students' needs, families are welcome, etc.)?

If the lawmaker only remembers one thing from the visit, what would you want it to be (e.g., preparing all students for their best future, etc.)?

School Visit CheckList

The following checklists are designed to guide you through the meticulous planning and execution of this important school visit. It covers everything from preliminary preparations to the actual day's logistics and post-visit follow-ups, ensuring that the lawmaker departs with a clear and compelling understanding of the impact your school has on students, families, and the community.

BEFORE THE VISIT	
Invite the elected leader for a school visit. (see Sample School Visit Invite)	
Assign a point-of-contact for the legislator and ensure they exchange email and mobile phone information (likely with a staff member).	
Circulate a meeting reminder 24-48 hours in advance.	
Send the Legislator and their staff clear directions to the school location and parking instructions.	
Identify potential participants and invite them to the event (see Identifying & Preparing Speakers).	
Create a meeting agenda and map your campus tour (see Sample Meeting Agenda).	
Research the elected official you invited (e.g., their hometown, committees they serve on, district composition, personal and professional interests, level of familiarity with your school/families you serve)	
Prepare meeting participants with all relevant details (e.g., agenda, meeting objectives, their role/responsibilities, elected official background, talking points, tips to tell the charter school's story)	
Prepare a small packet of materials for the legislator. (Include information about your school, a fact sheet that supports your ask, etc. Work with FCCS to prepare these materials.)	
Plan for media (see Sample Media Advisory and Sample Press Release)	

DAY OF VISIT	
Arrive early.	
Provide refreshments.	
Supply name tags, pens, note paper, and markers in the meeting room.	
Create a sign-in sheet to track attendance.	
Position someone near the entrance to escort the legislator to the meeting location (e.g., a prepared student or two).	
Designate a timekeeper to keep the visit on track.	
Designate a note-taker to capture meeting notes, including key discussion points and action items for follow-up.	
Conduct the tour and discussion.	
Assign a photographer to capture the legislator in discussion with parents, students, board members, and staff. Posed group photos are also good.	
Send media advisory (see Sample Media Advisory)	
Have fun – this is about building a human connection!	
AFTER THE VISIT FOLLOW-UP:	
Promote the visit on social media and through external communication (e.g., blog, newsletter, etc.). Follow the lawmaker on social media and them and FCCS @FreedmCoalition. (Sample Social Media Posts) Share Photos.	
Debrief with all who attended from your school team. (Debrief Template)	
Follow up with FCCS staff to share your feedback on the visit. (Is there any information the legislator requested that you would like FCCS to get to you or the legislator? Do you have any advice for FCCS or other schools as we attempt to develop our relationship with this legislator?)	
Send press release (see Sample Press Release) & Thank You Letter .	

Identifying & Preparing Spokespeople

It is crucial to strategically select a diverse group of spokespeople who have the capacity to convey different aspects of your school's story. This approach ensures that the lawmaker departs with a clear and compelling understanding of the impact your school has on students, families, and the community.

Possible Spokespeople

- **School Principal:** Responsible for discussing the school's broader mission, campus initiatives, and engagement with students and parents, as well as outlining future decisions.
- **Assistant Principal:** Adept at elaborating on similar themes as the School Principal, including the school's broader mission, campus initiatives, and ways of fostering engagement among students and parents.
- **Teach Representative:** A faculty member who specializes in addressing topics related to educational practices, student success, and the academic environment.
- **Parent Representative:** A spokesperson who provides perspectives on the overall school community and interactions with the school administration.
- **Student representative:** A student who can articulate the experiences of their peers, shedding light on the student perspective within the overall school community.

School Leaders Should Be Prepared to Answer the Following Questions:

- **Leadership Vision and Motivation:**
 - *Why did you choose to lead this school?*
 - *What excites you about leading a charter school?*
- **Educational Philosophy and Experience:**
 - *How does your educational background shape your approach to school leadership?*
- **Family and Community Engagement:**
 - *How do you and your staff work with families to ensure the school meets each child's needs?*

Teachers Should Be Prepared to Answer the Following Questions:

- **Personal and Educational Background:**
 - *What is your story, and how does your background shape your approach to teaching?*
- **Professional Satisfaction and School Environment:**
 - *What makes your school a fulfilling place for students and you as a teacher?*
- **Innovative Teaching and Community Engagement:**
 - *How does being a teacher at a charter school allow you to be creative in meeting your students' and their families' needs?*

Parents Should Be Prepared to Answer the Following Questions:

- **Reasons for School Choice:**
 - *Why did you pick this charter school for your child, and what makes it special?*
- **Child's Individual Needs and School Environment:**
 - *What kind of school environment works best for your child and why?*
- **Educational Aspirations and Support:**
 - *How are the teachers and this school helping to prepare your child to reach their dreams?*

Students Should Be Prepared to Answer the Following Questions:

- **School Experience:**
 - *What is your favorite thing about your school?*
- **Emotional Connection and Well-being:**
 - *How do you feel when you are at school?*
- **Personal Reason for School Choice:**
 - *Why did your family choose this school for you?*

Sample Materials

Annual Calendar of Events

Keeping elected leaders engaged throughout the year keeps them mindful of the importance of the charter public school movement's importance, its successes, and its challenges. Below are a few ideas to help your school community stay in touch throughout the year.

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- **Year Round:** Send any announcements, press releases, or significant accomplishments to their local district offices and tag them on social media.
- **August:** Invite your elected leader to Back-to-School events.
- **September - November:** Host your elected leader during a school visit.
- **December:** Welcome newly elected leaders; kickoff charter school education email series
- **January:** Update your elected leader email lists and add them to your school mailing list for newsletters and eNewsletters. Be sure to follow your legislators on social media.
- **February - April:** Participate in statewide and national legislation and policy calls to action.
- **May:** Invite your legislator to a celebration at your school for National Charter Schools Week
- **June:** Invite your legislator to speak at your school's end-of-the-year ceremonies and graduations.
- **July:** Visit your legislator in their district office.

Introductory Email

Good morning/afternoon Senator/Assembly member [Name],

I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself as [Your title] at [School name] in [City]. At [School name], [insert a little bit about your school's vision, mission, and what makes your school/students stand out].

As a public school that educates [number] students living in your district, we would love for you to visit our school to see [insert something about what your school is currently doing that is helping meet individual student needs]. We understand you have a busy schedule, and we appreciate any time you can set aside to meet with our school community.

Thank you again for your time, and we look forward to connecting. I will follow up shortly to schedule a visit to our school soon.

Warmly,



School Visit Invite

Good morning/afternoon Senator/Assemblymember [Name],

I hope this email finds you well [include something about a personal connection if you already made one]. I'm writing to you today to invite you to join [School name] for [purpose of your meeting or event] on [date/time/location - expect no more than 1 hour of the legislator's time]. [OR I'd like the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our school and what it has done for students and families in your district.]

[Insert a brief story about your school.]

Use this paragraph to provide a brief rundown of the program or event, how long you anticipate the visit will last, and what role, if any, the lawmaker will play (e.g., speak, meet with parents, present something, receive something).

I understand you have a busy schedule, and I appreciate your time and consideration. You can reach me at [your phone number and email address]. I will follow up with a phone call in a few days.

Thank you for your consideration. I very much look forward to our meeting.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Name of school]

School Visit Invite

The Honorable [Name]
[Street address]
[City, state, ZIP]

Dear Senator/Representative [Name]:

On behalf of the students and staff at [School name], I would like to thank you for your visit. We were thrilled to host you, and we hope you will visit us again soon.

I hope you enjoyed touring our school, and [insert specific activity or detail about the tour - e.g. "working with our ninth-grade students to create a mural in the building lobby"]. I appreciated the opportunity to share [School name's] many successes and the enormous benefits [School name] provides to the families in the community.

I want to reiterate how important your support for charter public schools is to our school, students, and the community.

Again, thank you for visiting [School name]. We look forward to hosting you again and working towards our mutual goal of providing high-quality educational options for families.

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Title]
[Name of school]

Additional Tips

- These emails should ideally come from the school principal or leader, unless a different school representative will attend and lead the meeting on behalf of your school.
- School leaders, board members, and parent leaders who attend these meetings can write similar types of emails as well, adjusting to make it personal.

Sample Meeting Agenda for School Staff (Internal)

- **Welcome (2-3 minutes)**
 - School leader welcomes the legislator and thanks them for their visit
 - School leader briefly introduces the staff and board members in attendance.
 - School leader acknowledges students and families and that they will be introducing themselves and sharing their perspectives during the meeting.
- **Introduce the School (3-4 minutes)**
 - Share charter schools 101 (e.g., public, free, open to all).
 - School leader or staff member briefly talks about the school's history, number of students, student diversity, and number of ELL and SPED students the school serves, if comparable to district schools. Share school successes.
 - If you start your visit with a tour, provide many of these school details during the school tour. If the legislator has already toured the building, invite them to do an activity with students: Read a book, shoot hoops, join them for lunch, participate in an art class, etc. Or schedule their return visit around a particular school event you would like to share/highlight.)
- **Parent and Family Introductions (20+ minutes)**
 - It is essential for legislators to understand and hear why parents have chosen your school. (See [Spokespeople Who Tell the Story](#) Section).
 - Ask each parent to speak for around 2-3 minutes (depending on how many parents you have), introducing themselves and sharing what they value most about the school.
 - Take notes on the legislator's questions for a detailed follow-up later in the meeting or in a letter.
 - Parents are just sharing their authentic viewpoints. They should not discuss facts or policy, only their personal experience.
- **Discuss Your Ask/Your School's Needs (5-10 minutes)**
 - Here is a good time for staff and board members to talk about the challenges the school faces and how the legislator can be helpful.
 - Be specific: What do you need? Discuss opportunities to work with the legislator on legislation (e.g., funding equity, diversifying the teacher pipeline), policy, and/or your school's renewal or facilities needs that are most important. Give examples.
 - Make your ask (e.g., support this policy or legislation).
 - Continue campus tour, visit 2nd classroom, introduce the elected leader to teachers and class OR have elected official meet with parents, teachers, and/or students in the auditorium.
 - Contact FCCS for help in crafting your meeting agenda and asks.
- **Thank you, Wrap-up (5-10 mins),**
 - Thank the elected official for joining you & provide "leave behind" packet.
 - Offer to provide additional follow-up.

Sample Meeting Agenda for Elected Officials (External)

School Name

Address

Date

Time

9:00 am	[School leader name] greets [Elected leader name] at main entrance
9:05 am	School tour begins
9:10 am	[Elected leader name] visits [Classroom 1 info] to speak with [Student info] and their interest in (NOTE: USE THIS TIME TO DISCUSS CHARTER 101 AND YOUR SCHOOL SPECIFICS)
9:30 am	[Elected leader name] visits [Classroom 2 info or Auditorium] (NOTE: USE THIS TIME TO DISCUSS SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS, AND MAKE ASKS)
9:50 am	Tour ends. [School leader name] escorts [Elected leader name] to main entrance

Notes

- Timing the tour can be challenging (late arrival by legislator, etc.), so plan for that and have different class options available depending on the time.
- Ensure the legislator gets a well-rounded view of your school, ideally seeing different subjects and ages.
- Be prepared to answer questions from the legislator on common misconceptions or criticisms of charter schools, ideally by providing school-specific examples.
- Showcase what you are proud of and verify your school leader is available to lead the tour and answer questions. If there are opportunities to get the legislator involved (a civics class, etc.), also have that option available.
- Finally, confirm that all staff/teachers know about the visit so that the halls/classrooms are orderly and prepared.

Sample Media Advisory

Media Advisory

[Date]

Media Contact:

[Name], [Email], [Phone number] / [email address]

Add the Title of Your Event Here. Keep it Short and Direct

[City, State] – [Provide a brief description of what your event is here. You should include why this is important and/or of interest to the media and their viewers/readers. It should be no longer than three or four sentences, as you will include the “Five Ws” in the space below.]

Who: Your school, school leaders’ names, featured speakers, elected officials, any notable attendees, parents, teachers, students, etc.

What: A brief one or two sentence event description

Where: School name and full address

When: Date and time

If your school requires security clearance before visitors enter the building, make a note here asking for media to RSVP (this also helps gauge how much press you can expect). Your sentence should be in line with: Members of the media interested in attending this event should email/call [contact name at preferred contact method].

About [School name]: Provide a short paragraph about your school here. This can be your mission statement or vision. Don’t forget to add your website at the end.

RSVP: Media covering the event must register with [name] at [phone number] or [email address]

About [School name]

[Insert boilerplate language].

###

Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Today's Date

Contact Name, Phone Number/Email

Your Title Should be a Description of Your Event/Newsworthy Story, Try to Keep This on Two Lines

CITY NAME, STATE – On [day of the week of your event], [School name] hosted a [brief description of your event/describe the story you want to share]. Tell everyone why this was important; think of this as your opportunity to control and define the narrative you want to see published in the media. Keep in mind, if members of the press are reading this release, they may not have attended your event and are relying on you to provide them with easy copy to publish. Keep this paragraph to about four sentences.

Your second paragraph should be a quote from your school leader noting the significance of this event, achievement, or story you are highlighting," said [name of board president or school leader, title]." Be sure to attribute the quote after the first sentence and bold the text so it stands out. You can add up to three additional sentences here. At this point, you should be connecting the significance of this event/story to the flexibility and autonomy of charter schools.

Your third paragraph should focus on more details about the event or news story you are pitching. It can include relevant statistics and background information about the project. If your board members or elected officials attend, do not forget to mention them here. Don't forget to thank the notable people and organizations who helped make this happen.

Your fourth paragraph should again be a quote, this time from a board member, teacher, parent, student, said [name, title, - parent, student - school name]. Follow the same guidelines for all quotes.

The best practice is to have one paragraph of storytelling followed by a quote paragraph. And repeat. Try not to have two quote paragraphs next to each other. Keep paragraphs under four or five sentences.

Keep in mind many print organizations do not like to print more than 600 words for a story. Attach photos to your email and make sure any students you include have a media permission slip on file with your school.

Sample Social Media Posts

- **Twitter/X**

- We're thrilled to have @(Legislator Handle) join us today for a campus tour and to meet with our students, faculty, and staff! @FreedmCoalition @charteralliance (insert photo).
- @(Legislator Handle) sits in on (insert tour details, classroom visits, etc)! @FreedmCoalition @charteralliance (insert photo)
- Today, we met with @(Legislator Handle) to discuss how they can support public, tuition-free charter schools in (your state/city) @FreedmCoalition @charteralliance (insert photo)
- Thank you @[Legislator Twitter Handle] for meeting with our students, faculty, and staff today to discuss how you can support our school and #CharterSchools like ours! @FreedmCoalition @charteralliance (insert photo)

- **Facebook**

- Today, @[Legislator Handle] visited our public charter school to meet with students and teachers. They toured our campus and heard from our community how they can continue to support our public charter school and charters like ours across the state! Thank you, @[Legislator Handle], for the opportunity to share the story of our school and families! (insert photos)

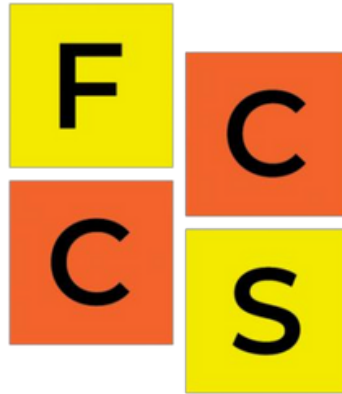
- Why do families choose [School name] for their children? Because we have something unique to offer! Today, @[Legislator Handle] visited our classrooms, art rooms, and science labs and got to observe a class in action. Thank you so much, @[Legislator Handle], for coming and learning more about our students, teachers, and families! (insert photos)

Sample Thank You Letter Post- Visit

- **Twitter/X**

- We're thrilled to have @(Legislator Handle) join us today for a campus tour and to meet with our students, faculty, and staff! @FreedmCoalition @charteralliance (insert photo).
- @(Legislator Handle) sits in on (insert tour details, classroom visits, etc)! @FreedmCoalition @charteralliance (insert photo)
- Today, we met with @(Legislator Handle) to discuss how they can support public, tuition-free charter schools in (your state/city) @FreedmCoalition @charteralliance (insert photo)
- Thank you @[Legislator Twitter Handle] for meeting with our students, faculty, and staff today to discuss how you can support our school and #CharterSchools like ours! @FreedmCoalition @charteralliance (insert photo)

Do	Do Not
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be professional and answer questions. If you don't know an answer don't guess, tell them you will get back to them with the details. Practice, practice, practice. • Be clear on what you want to achieve, how you want the lawmaker to feel. Be sure your spokespeople tell the whole story of your school. • Keep to the agenda and plan. Make your points personal and ensure they demonstrate impact. Be respectful of the lawmaker's time. Provide written material and contact information. • Take photos and share them. • Be specific. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be intimidated; lawmakers are human, just like you. • Have too much on your agenda/tour. Assume the lawmaker knows about your school or charter schools broadly. • Talk about other charter schools (or district schools) in a negative light. Make it argumentative or hostile. • Let them bait you into an adversarial discussion. • Let the visit be the end of the advocacy – it is just the beginning. • Be disappointed if the visit is with a staffer. DO figure out how to engage directly with the lawmaker in the future.



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If you require additional information or are interested in customized training sessions related to this toolkit, the FCCS team is ready to assist. We specialize in hosting interactive and impactful training sessions that can be adapted to various regions and contexts, ensuring relevance and effectiveness.



Freedom Coalition for Charter Schools



@freedmcoalition