

STUDENT VOICE
THE MOVEMENT IS LIVE.

SCHOOL BOARD
TESTIFYING
GUIDE

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STUDENT VOICE OVERVIEW



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STEP 1:

INFORM

Inform yourself on the structure of Board meetings.

Find out when and where they are held and the procedures for public comment. Do you need to sign up beforehand to comment? Is there a time constraint for commenting? This info is usually available on your school district's website. If the website does not have a section labeled school board, it could also be called the Board of Trustees, Board of Education, etc.

Knowledge is power. The knowledge of both the topic you are discussing and how your local school board's procedures work is key to creating change. The date and time of most school board meetings can be found either on your school's website or posted around your school. If you're still confused on board procedures, feel free to ask teachers or administrators.

On the date of your testimony make sure to:

- Arrive early and well-dressed
- Sign up ahead of time
- Keep your testimony within the time limits

Remember, there is strength in numbers, so feel free to bring other students who share your concerns or even a signed petition to show support from the community. Simply complaining does not change things. Make sure you are presenting a solution. Come prepared with a possible course of action that can be either directly agreed upon or rejected and compromised on. While developing your plan, be sure to research what other schools have implemented. Be familiar with any possible consequences of changing existing policy and have arguments to counteract them. Stay calm and relaxed - you've got nothing to lose and everything to gain! In the words of A.A. Milne, "You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

Written by ambassador Jared Stefanowicz



**MAKE SURE
YOU ARE
PRESENTING
A SOLUTION.
SIMPLY
COMPLAINING
DOES NOT
CHANGE
THINGS.**

STEP 2:

IDENTIFY

Identify a major school issue to address in your speech.

If you wish to mention multiple issues, search for the “umbrella issue” that unites them. (“Umbrella issues” could be rights on the Student Bill of Rights, or it could be something like “corrupt spending.”)

It is necessary to identify a major issue to speak about at the meeting. You should begin by surveying issues within your schools, along with asking students and teachers for their opinions.

You can do this by:

- Simply asking around!
- Identify problems that have impacted you, family, or friends.
- Survey students at your school to see their views on the issue.
- Bring the problem to the school administration to see their take.
- Have a conversation with a friend, teacher or administrator about your issue to see if there is agreement or hostility.

From there, make a list of problems and move to narrowing and focusing on a handful of issues. Make sure you are passionate about the issue you choose. Once you have your top 5-10 issues, start grouping them into larger issues. (For example, self-esteem, stress, and suicide can be grouped under Mental Health. Or discrimination, inequality can be grouped under Equity.)

Written by ambassador Jaylan Scott



SEARCH FOR THE “UMBRELLA ISSUE” THAT UNITES SUBJECTS OF CONFLICT.

STEP 3:

RESEARCH

Research the issue and the student perspective.

Find scientific studies, anecdotal data, etc. that support your position. Search for concrete evidence of the problem to demonstrate to the Board. Your ideas are just ideas, but when they are backed up with proven evidence they can become an impactful conversation.

Board members appear to be all about effectiveness, and it is necessary to convey your point with backed up research. Concrete research on innovative education topics may be difficult to find, but use current systems as exemplars that can be replicated in your district. It can appear scary to a school system if they are the first ones to try something new, so by showing that your idea has worked somewhere else, it reassures them that there is minimal area for failure. Anyone can come up with an idea, but if it is not backed up with evidence, it can be easily pushed to the side as unimportant.

Gathering the student perspective is just as important as researching quantitative data. When you go to gather student input, be sure to ask a diverse group of students beyond just your close friends. It is very important to make sure whatever topic or change you are advocating to the school board works for all students.

Some ways you can gather student input are by:

- Conducting a survey online
- Hosting a roundtable discussion using the Student Voice Facilitator Guide
- Set up a table with information and conversation before school or at lunch

Written by ambassador Kaleb Cook



**RESEARCH REASSURES THEM THAT THERE IS MINIMAL
AREA FOR FAILURE.**

STEP 4:

WRITE

Write your testimony to support your position.

Now that you've identified an issue you're passionate about and found concrete and anecdotal evidence to support your position, write your testimony. Use confident, powerful language to attract the audience's attention, but keep in mind that comments do not have to sound formal. In fact, your testimony will be more effective if you use first person, convey emotion, and share your personal experience. Write in the way you can imagine yourself speaking—but be respectful! Make sure to also keep in mind the amount of time you have to speak. At a brisk but reasonable pace, you can fit in between 150-200 words per minute.

In general, you should begin your testimony by stating the issue you're focusing on, then support your position with all the of the evidence you've gathered. Try to end your speech with a powerful anecdote or call to action, which will make your testimony more memorable and impactful.

You can also use this specific format: Story of Self, Story of Us, and Story of Now. Start with your own story—a short bio about yourself and why you're testifying. Then, discuss the issue that the population you're representing is facing using the evidence you've gathered. This will lead you into your conclusion, a call to action or reason to make change now.

Testimony template:

1. My name is ____ and I'm a (grade level) at ____ school. I'm here today to discuss (issue). I've personally struggled with (issue) when (story, anecdote, description of your personal struggle, etc)
2. Alternatively, introduce yourself, then open with a shocking or surprising fact you've found while researching, such as: "One in five adolescents face a diagnosable mental health challenge, but the gap between onset of symptoms and treatment is, on average, 10 years." Then, proceed with your own story, the story of us, and the story of now.
3. I've seen and discussed (issue) with my peers at my school and others throughout the district. (Insert anecdotal information about your experiences). (Insert other evidence you've found).
4. (Issue) must be (changed, reformed, etc).
5. Optional: (Insert suggestions of general or specific ways to address the issue at hand)

Written by ambassador Allison Tu

STEP 5:

TESTIFY

Now you're ready to testify to the Board!

Make sure you are well-rested and prepared on the day of the Board meeting. Eat and go to the bathroom before entering the meeting. When it is your time to comment, walk confidently to the stand, and introduce yourself to the Board. You will most likely have to state your name and address. Once you feel ready - don't rush yourself - begin your speech.

You should minimize your stress the night before you present. You can practice by running through your speech either in front of a mirror or wall, but it's best if you can practice with a real person! If you have a script ready, be sure to have it done days before so you can give it teachers or a trusted adult to proofread. Always be sure to reread and make any changes if necessary.

The day of your presentation should be like a normal day, attend all your classes if it is a school day. If your presentation lands on a non-school day try to spend your day relaxing.

Be sure your speech flows smoothly and isn't choppy. It may be hard to stay on topic if you don't have a script so even bullet points are helpful. Find as much information on your topic so you are ready to answer any questions.

Do not feel rushed and begin whenever you're ready. As you go through your speech if you become overwhelmed, focus on taking deep breaths, take a moment to yourself, and continue your presentation.

Here are some tips to help you prior to your presentation.

1. Drink water before you start
2. Use the restroom prior
3. If you have a speech written bold or highlight the first phrase of each paragraph to guide your eyes
4. Space out lines in your speech to 1.5 or even 2 minutes
5. Make the font bigger for your eyes to follow

Written by ambassador Odalis Aguilar

STUDENT VOICE

OVERVIEW

ABOUT THE AMBASSADORS:

The 2017-18 Student Voice Ambassadors is a program run by the Accelerate team. Our ambassadors are high school students across the United States that are poised to create social impacts in their local communities. The ambassadors have an intense focus on educational equity and use diverse approaches to take action on issues that impact their education.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE:

We hope this guide is helpful for any students looking to share their voice at a local school board meeting, public forum or gathering. The 2017-18 Student Voice Ambassadors with assistance from Student Voice created this guide for students, by students.. Special credit should be given to ambassadors Jared, Jaylan, Kaleb, Allison and Odalis as they wrote inspiring content for each section of this guide.

ABOUT STUDENT VOICE:

Student Voice is a completely student-run, non-partisan, not-for-profit organization inspired by the premise that all students should have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Student Voice strengthens the student movement by empowering students to take action on issues that most impact their education. Our mission is realized by amplifying, aggregating and accelerating student voices. For more information about Student Voice, visit StuVoice.org, follow @Stu_Voice and #StuVoice on Twitter and Instagram and like our page on Facebook.

