



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 2020, Florida ranked 41st out of 50 states in per student educational expenditures. [Source: Cornman, S.Q., Phillips, J.J., Howell, M.R., and Zhou, L. (2022). *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: FY 20* (NCES 2022-301). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved [date] from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.]
 - Florida = \$10,305
 - United States National Average = \$13,489
- ✓ In **2023**, Florida's Free and Reduced Lunch rate was **71.3%**; Osceola's was **76.9%**. (Source: [Florida Department of Education](#))
- ✓ In **2023**, Osceola received **2.47%** of state education funding but had **2.55%** of Florida's entire student enrollment. (Source: [Florida Department of Education](#))
 - Osceola = 76,094.86 UFTE* Students (or 2.55%)
 - Florida = 2,978,905.57 UFTE* Students
 - Osceola = \$607,556,480, or \$607.6 Million (or 2.47%)
 - Florida = \$24,553,265,386, or \$24.6 Billion
- ✓ That **0.08%** difference between UFTE and K-12 total funding was still **\$19,646,111.08 or \$19.7 Million**, that Osceola County schools and students did NOT receive.

* An unweighted full-time-equivalent (UFTE) for a student in Kindergarten to Grade 3 = 720 hours of instruction and in Grades 4 to 12 = 900 hours of instruction (or one regular school year's instruction). For most students, one UFTE equals one student.

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

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

- o <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Calendar/2023/Session%20Dates%202022-12-01%20082214.PDF>

House Calendars and Schedules

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

Senate Calendars and Schedules

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

How a Bill Becomes a Law (House)

- o [https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/api/document/house?Leaf=HouseContent/opi/Lists/Just%20for%20Students/Attachments/4/How%20an%20Idea%20Becomes%20a%20Law%20\(Advanced\).pdf](https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/api/document/house?Leaf=HouseContent/opi/Lists/Just%20for%20Students/Attachments/4/How%20an%20Idea%20Becomes%20a%20Law%20(Advanced).pdf)

How a Bill Becomes a Law (Senate)

- o <https://www.flsenate.gov/PublishedContent/ADMINISTRATIVEPUBLICATIONS/idea-to-law.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

Representative Fred Hawkins
District 35



Tom.Keen@myfloridahouse.gov

Capitol Office

1401 House Office Building
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 717-5035

District Office

Suite 308
13000 Avalon Lake Drive
Orlando, FL 32828-6448
District Office Phone: (407) 249-4204

Legislative Aide: London Camel
District Aide: Zane Matter

Representative Kristen Arrington
District 46



Kristen.Arrington@myfloridahouse.gov

Capitol Office

1302 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 717-5046

District Office

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

Legislative Aide: Carla Rivera-Marrero
District Aide: TBA

Representative Caroline Amesty
District 45



Caroline.Amesty@myfloridahouse.gov

Capitol Office

1101 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 717-5045

District Office

TBA
District Office Phone: TBA

Legislative Assistant: Victoria Estrada
District Secretary: Joseph Melendez

Representative Name
District 47



Paula.Stark@myfloridahouse.gov

Capitol Office

1102 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 717-5047

District Office

TBA
District Office Phone: TBA

Legislative Aide: Mercedes Fonseca
District Aide: Peter Vivaldi

Senator Victor Torres
District 25



torres.oscar.web@flsenate.gov

Capitol Office

214 Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100
Capitol Office Phone: (850) 487-5025

District Office

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

Legislative Aides: Debra Booth, Julian Cintron, Lurimar Cruz-Cortes, and Alfred Yorston

Osceola County School Board

Terry Castillo, Vice Chair

District 1



Terry Castillo
817 Bill Beck Boulevard
Kissimmee, FL 34744
Phone: (407) 870-4009

terry.castillo@osceolaschools.net

Julius Melendez

District 2



Julius Melendez
817 Bill Beck Boulevard
Kissimmee, FL 34744
Phone: (407) 870-4009

julius.melendez@osceolaschools.net

Jon Arguello

District 3



Jon Arguello
817 Bill Beck Boulevard
Kissimmee, FL 34744
Phone: (407) 870-4009

jon.arguello@osceolaschools.net

Heather Kahoun, Chair

District 4



Heather Kahoun
817 Bill Beck Boulevard
Kissimmee, FL 34744
Phone: (407) 870-4009

heather.kahoun@osceolaschools.net

Vacant
District 5

District 5
817 Bill Beck Boulevard
Kissimmee, FL 34744
Phone: (407) 870-4009

District5@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 many unfunded mandates that limit 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.
- Be professional, transparent and genuine.
- Follow up in a timely manner. Especially if you're clarifying an issue for them.
- Make the issue relevant and personal to the staffer or legislator.
- Stay out of the weeds. The details can come later if he or she is interested.
- Know ahead of time who will oppose your idea and how to respond to it.
- Ask how you can help the elected official or their staff member.
- Be On Time**
- Use what you've got. If you already know a staffer in an office, ask them who handles your issue.
- Spend time rallying stakeholders prior to approaching the legislator.
- Gain as an ally a close friend of the member of Congress you would like to approach. Sneaky, but effective.

Need to contact Hill staffers? Try Knowlegis.

cqrollcall.com/knowlegis



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 wine and dine a staffer to "buy" his or her time.



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



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

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

DON'T...

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 continue to call when an email exchange will work.

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



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

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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