

# BECOME AN ADVOCATE - LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

Colorado has **178** school districts, each with its own local board, usually comprised of 5-7 members serving, 4-year, unpaid terms. Some positions may serve “at large” while others may be “districted.” Terms are generally staggered and elections held in odd years.

## WHO ARE YOUR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS & WHAT DO THEY DO?

**School Board Members:** School boards generally implement state education laws, create local policies for districts and individual schools, study issues and make recommendations for education challenges in the district, approve the district budget, and hire the Superintendent.

**Superintendent:** The Superintendent is responsible for setting the vision of the school district and leading the day-to-day administration of the schools and overseeing principals, who oversee teachers and staff.

1. **MEET WITH THEM PERSONALLY.** Get to know your School Board Members, regardless of party, ideally before you need to advocate on any particular topic. Then take the next step and get to know all of the other members of council, whether they are yours or not.
2. **GET TO KNOW THEIR COMMITTEE STRUCTURE.** Most school boards have policy or working committees that do the initial work and research to study or make recommendations on particular issues. **Engage early.** You can get items on the agenda and help shape the agenda and the debate before and during committee meetings.
3. **WHEN DO THEY MEET?** Meeting schedules, frequency and topics vary for each School Board. Most School Board meetings, agendas, and minutes are now available online.
4. **SHOW UP - OPEN MEETINGS & OPEN RECORDS.** Your School Board meetings are subject to the Open meetings requirement, which means all meetings (date, time and agenda) are required to be publicly posted. You have a

right to attend (unless executive session) and get copies of the minutes or public county documents.

5. **TIP: ALERTS & E-NEWSLETTERS.** Many now have alerts or newsletters you can sign up for in order to get notice of what items will be under consideration, when.
6. **TESTIFY.** Public testimony is typically allowed and welcomed, but may be regulated as to time, place, topic at hand, and duration. Your testimony might sway votes and can be the basis for legal challenges in the future. Best practice includes your name, where you live and a brief explanation (stories or data) about why you support or oppose.
7. **CALL, EMAIL OR ASK FOR A MEETING.** If you care about issue up for a vote or want to get an item put on a meeting agenda, you can call, email or schedule a meeting before the vote.
8. **PUBLIC OPINION & PUBLIC ACTION.** You can grow attention to a local decision through Petitions, Op Eds, Facebook Groups, Twitter, local newspapers, radio station, press releases, press conference, and organizing with allied groups.

#### **TIPS:**

- **Be Courteous.** No matter how contentious or frustrating the issue may be courtesy will always get you further.
- **Be Personal.** Share your own story about why this matters to you. Data can be helpful to.
- **Be Relevant.** Make sure your testimony is closely connected and related to the topic under debate or consideration.
- **Civics Club.** You can organize to have different people in the community adopt different committees or meetings so you always have eyes and years on the School Board's work.
- **Be Known (in a good way).** Your credibility matters on your first impression so that more weight will be given to your ideas and your solutions.