How to Support and Defend Your Local School Board

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SAVE OUR SCHOOLS

Strong Schools, Strong State™

Who We Are

We are a nonpartisan, community-based organization fighting for strong public schools for a stronger Arizona

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School Boards in Arizona

- Democratically elected and unpaid
  - Can hold other offices
- Nonpartisan (no primary)
- Most districts have 5 at-large seats
- Most terms last for 4 years
- Elections are staggered
  - In a presidential election year, most SBs have 3 seats up for election — meaning **every single board could have a new makeup next year**

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Why School Boards Matter

- Before 2020, school boards were relatively boring with little controversy
- School boards became a battleground for **distrust**
  - 2020 – School Closures
  - 2021 – Reopening Schools and Masks
  - 2022 – CRT, SEL, and DEI
  - 2023 – Book Bans and attacks on LGBTQ+ students and staff
- Part of the process to **discredit**, **defund**, and **dismantle** public education

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Why?

Last May, former Donald Trump adviser Steve Bannon made a similar comment on his podcast. “The path to save the nation is very simple — it’s going to go through the school boards,” Bannon predicted. But Bannon pointed to a very different set of issues: critical race theory and the 1619 Project. He didn’t mention religion at all.

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What happens at board meetings?

- Regular Meeting (not all districts are the same!)
  - Call to Order & meeting opening
  - Student & Staff celebrations
  - Gov Member Updates
  - Reports and presentations
  - Consent Agenda
  - Standard Agenda
  - **Call to the Public**
- Executive Sessions & Study Sessions

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Open Meeting Laws

- School Board Members can only discuss items on the agenda
  - If an item isn't on the agenda, stakeholders can't give feedback or make comments
  - School board members cannot respond to public comment
- Any time a quorum is met (either virtual or in person), it is an official meeting
- Agenda must be available to the public at least twenty-four hours before meeting

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Card Sort

Sort your cards into 4 categories:

- What board members do
- What board members don't do
- What board members should do
- What board members shouldn't do

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What SB Members DO:

School boards can vote on employment, purchasing, & budget preparation decisions:

- Hiring and evaluating the district superintendent
- Approving the budget
- Monitoring the budget
- Approving salaries for employees
- Approving purchases

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What SB Members DO:

School boards may also vote on district policy, curriculum, and other critical decisions:

- Establishing and approving policies
- Approving curriculum materials
- Adopting the school calendar
- Closing or constructing schools

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What SB Members DON'T DO:

- Fire teachers they don't like
- Become involved in procurement
- Decide on amount of funding —
  - State leg decision
- Lead Bond / Override process
  - PAC President

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What SB Members SHOULD DO:

- Visit schools & participate in events
- Earn the trust of and collaborate with staff, parents, students, and the community
- Build relationships with community partners (cities, businesses, nonprofits)
- Stay up to date on education policy at the local, state, and national levels
- Advocate for adequate funding from the state legislature

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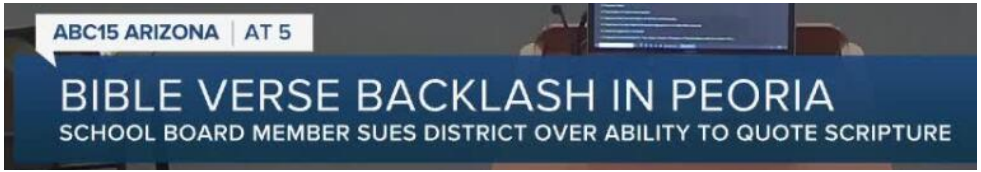
What SB Members SHOULDN'T DO:

- Visit Schools Unannounced
- Bring up issues that district doesn't have the power to resolve
- Stir up unnecessary trouble for their district
  - Vote no just for the sake of voting no
  - Make speeches/comments that threaten stakeholders or erode trust



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Key Issue #1: Culture Wars

- Personal attacks, particularly on LGBTQ+ members and students
- Battles about curriculum, book bans, trans youth supports, bathrooms, pronouns
- Attacks on decisions regarding religious partnerships, characterized as “anti-Christian”

What to do: Support members & students, lift up student voices, avoid fueling the opposition — stay focused on actual district policy

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Key Issue #2: Privatization

- Charter co-location attempts
- Bringing in third party operators
- School closures & purchases
- Ousting of superintendents
- Anti-ed board members encouraging vouchers

What to do: Help connect the dots, educate school board members about the players and larger privatization agenda

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Groups to Watch

ALEC American Legislative Exchange Council
LIMITED GOVERNMENT • FREE MARKETS • FEDERALISM

AMERICAN FEDERATION for Children

The Heritage Foundation
LEADERSHIP FOR AMERICA

GOLDWATER INSTITUTE

CATO INSTITUTE®

MOMS for LIBERTY

Alliance for SCHOOL CHOICE

INSTITUTE for JUSTICE

ALLIANCE DEFENDING FREEDOM
FOR FAITH. FOR JUSTICE.

NACL National Association of Christian Lawmakers

AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY
ARIZONA

WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

yes. every kid.

edCHOICE

GreatHearts®

STATE POLICY NETWORK

What Should Volunteers Do?

What Should Volunteers Do?

Be a Ninja!

- Stand up, speak out, push back
- Ask questions of Board members via email
- Give public comment or sit in support
- In public comment, assume good intent & offer solutions
- Run for office, recruit & support great candidates

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Thank you!

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