OVERVIEW

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OBJECTIVE

Knowing how to influence school boards is an important part of making change in schools. School boards are made up of five, nine, or eleven elected officials who guide the superintendent in making many of the decisions for your district. Board decisions shape how education is delivered in a district, which affects the entire community now and for years to come. While the process can vary from district to district, Oregon Student Voice offers general guidelines for how to advocate for change before your school board.
UNDERSTAND THE SCHOOL BOARD’S ROLE

School boards set goals for the district, set budget and spending priorities, implement policies, and hire the superintendent (who then hires the principals). If you have a concern in your school, the principal and then the superintendent should be your first points of contact. If you feel limited progress is being made or your issue is districtwide, then the school board is where you can make change. Almost any issue can be escalated to the school board as they are responsible for the operations of the entire district.

EVALUATE WHAT YOU'RE ASKING

It is vital to explicitly identify the change you want to make. Questions to consider: What is your issue? What change would improve your issue? How will change benefit you as well as your peers? It is also important that you are knowledgeable about the problem that needs to be resolved as the school board will likely ask questions to further their understanding of their students’ needs. School boards are there to help resolve problems, so remember, the solution doesn’t have to be completely figured out before you bring a problem to the board.
BRING YOUR ISSUE TO THE SCHOOL BOARD

One method to ensure student concerns are heard and acknowledged by the school board is to bring your issue to a school board meeting. Testifying at a school board meeting can seem rather scary as it is in a public forum. Here are some tips to help you ensure your concern is heard and change happens.

1 GET ACQUAINTED

It is necessary that you understand how the school board runs their meetings. It can be helpful to attend meetings before you testify. If it is still unclear what the procedures are for the school board, don’t be afraid to ask. In most cases, board members or your school administrators will gladly explain the process.
MEET WITH MEMBERS INDIVIDUALLY

It can be useful to talk through your issue with board members prior to testifying. Some members will be easier to contact than others, but it is an important step to try. You can call or email members to set up a meeting. Contact information should be available on the district’s website. At the meeting, explicitly outline your issue and the change you desire. Be prepared to answer questions. During the meeting, strive to ascertain how the member feels about your issue and desired change, specifically whether they support you.

ORGANIZE

Encourage people who support your cause to attend the board meeting to show there is a need for this change. Invite people from throughout the community (especially students and parents) and see if they would like to testify as well. Showing that there is community involvement and interest in your cause can persuade board members to make change.
PREPARE

Writing your testimony ahead of time will help ensure that it is effective and easily understood. It is best if your speech is clearly worded and fairly short, but covers all of your important points. Another way to prepare is to ask a board member for a slot on the agenda ahead of time. You can also arrive early to sign-up to testify during the public comment period of the agenda.

TESTIFY

When testifying at a board meeting make sure you give your name, school, and grade. Speak clearly into the microphone, if one is provided, and if a microphone is not provided, be sure to speak loudly so that everyone can hear you. Keep an even and measured pace to your speech so that everyone can understand you.

ANSWER

Your school board may have questions after your testimony. Answer these respectfully and thoroughly. Board members may ask questions that seem to have simple answers or are unrelated to your cause. Answer these with respect and clarity.
THANK MEMBERS

When you are done testifying, be sure to thank the members for their time. It shows that you value their work and help.

BE PERSISTENT

When trying to influence your school board, it is crucial to stay persistent. Even if they say no the first time, if the issue is important, bring it back to them. The more your concern is brought to their attention, the more they will realize it is important to the students. After testifying at a school board meeting, follow up in person and/or electronically about next steps.
Approaching a school board can be daunting, but if you understand the way the it works and approach respectfully, it can be a fairly simple and rewarding experience. The board is there to help students and listen to their concerns. If you go through proper channels and persist after setbacks, the school board will help you reach your goal.

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