

MARCH FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH MONTH PLAYBOOK



Introduction

Over the last two decades the [Coalition for Community Schools](#), led by the [Institute for Educational Leadership](#), has been leading advocacy efforts to promote community schools as a vehicle to ensure all young people have the conditions they need to succeed and thrive.

March for Children and Youth Month was launched in 2017 as an annual campaign to concentrate our advocacy efforts among our national, state and local partners in one month. Our collective advocacy as a Coalition is important both to build champions among our policymakers for policies and funding that support children and youth and to strengthen our role as advocates for children and youth who are facing systemic inequities in their communities. When we live in an era where, across 32 states, the rate of child poverty for African-American and Hispanic children is at least twice that of their white peers, and in some states, their poverty rate is 4 or 5 times as high. With racial disparities in school, discipline are growing; we can no longer sit on the sidelines and hope others advocate for more equitable conditions-it must be us, it must be now, and we must speak with one voice.

During this campaign, we want policymakers to understand the power of community schools as a vehicle to address these inequities, as told through the stories and examples you as advocates can share. We also want policymakers to understand the systemic barriers in communities preventing children and youth from accessing unlimited opportunities, and own ideas on how these barriers can be tackled through policy-whether at the local, state or federal level. Join us during this month to raise our voices together to create the conditions of equity and opportunity we want for all children and youth across the country to experience every day.

Overview of March for Children and Youth Month Playbook

The March for Children and Youth Month Playbook is designed to provide simple steps to take action to allow for 100% participation across our networks and partners. We outline four different actions throughout the month:

1. [Twitter Storm](#) (March 4-8)
2. Promote the Coalition’s [Federal Policy Agenda](#) (March 11-15)
3. Grow a Champion (Meet with an elected official and/or staff)
4. Host a Site Visit (Host for your elected official and/or staff)

We ask that you aim to participate in at least one of these four actions (it is our hope you can participate in all of them). While the first two actions have weeks one (March 4-8) and two (March 11-15) designated for participation, the other two actions are not tied to any one week during March. We understand that it can take time to schedule a meeting with an elected official and prepare to host a site visit, so we encourage you to schedule these for a date that makes the most sense for you and your elected official (even if this means after March).

Level of Effort	Low	Low-Medium	Medium-High	High
Action	Tweet during week one and two using sample tweets	Email your members of Congress during week two (Promote Coalition’s Federal Policy Agenda)	Grow a Champion (meet with an elected official)	Host a site visit

Take a look at the chart below that lists these actions and the level of effort each will take. We hope this will help with planning actions you can commit to taking.

This Playbook includes guidance on each of these four actions, as well as resources ranging from sample tweets and emails to a model agenda for a school site visit for your elected official.

Finally, we ask that you share with us how you're participating! Whether you complete one action or all four, we ask that you log all of your actions throughout the month and help us track our collective activity across the country, to see how many elected officials we reach and demonstrate our power to speak in one voice for children and youth! A survey will be shared at the end of the campaign to collect all of the actions throughout the month.

Action 1: Twitter Storm (March 4-8)

Twitter Storm: From March 4-8, tweet every day with these sample tweets from the Coalition. Make sure to use the hashtags [#CommunitySchools](#) and [#March4Youth](#) and tag the Coalition at [@commschools](#) and IEL at [@ielconnects](#). Do not forget to tag your elected officials (members of Congress Twitter handles can be found [here](#), and see if your state and local elected officials have Twitter handles as well). We also invite you to craft tweets and share examples of how the community schools in your community help children, youth, and families. Tweet about how these particular programs and policies support the work that you want your elected officials to fund.

Action 2: Promote our Coalition's Federal Policy Agenda (March 11-15)

The Coalition's networks from coordinators to national partners - all weighed in on what they want to prioritize for this Congress, and we created our 116th federal policy agenda. This week, let's reach as many members of Congress as possible to share our policy agenda with them and ask for their support. During this week, we encourage you to email your members of Congress (and their education staff) and tweet at them to share our Coalition's federal policy agenda along with any examples from your school/community that illustrate the need and impact of these priorities.

Tweet at your members of Congress using these sample tweets and don't forget to tag your members of Congress (find their [Twitter handles](#)). Also share with your members of Congress your stories of success and how they can support and grow their success; as well as any systemic barriers in your community or state preventing all children and youth from accessing greater opportunities. We also want to hear your thoughts on what they could do to remove these barriers.

Email your members of Congress (and their education staff if you have their emails) using the sample email message below. We encourage you to customize it with your own examples/anecdotes from your own experience that show the need for these policies and programs. You can find the email of your member of Congress on their website found via [www.senate.gov](#) and [www.house.gov](#), or by calling their office. Similarly, you can find the email of their education staff by calling your member's office and asking for the contact information of their education staff.

Sample email to your members of Congress:

Dear Senator/Representative _____,

I am writing to you as a constituent and an advocate for community schools, which is a strategy that unites school, family and community for young people's success. In my role as (_____) in (city/state), I (describe what you do as it relates to community schools; or describe your role in advocating for community schools). I have seen first-hand the impact the community school strategy has on young people's success.

(Share a short example or story of a student or group of students from your community school/initiative/state). Community schools are backed by strong research. The Learning Policy Institute in a 2017 brief recommends community schools as an evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement that states should consider for implementation of ESSA.

These school-community partnerships also yield a strong social return on investment, with one study finding that every dollar invested in such schools produced at least a \$10.30 return in social value.

I am a member of the Coalition for Community Schools, an alliance of over 200 national, state and local partners who believe in the community schools approach to student success. I urge you to support and champion the following programs and legislation in the 116th Congress to give more young people the access and opportunities they deserve to thrive:

- 1) Funding for Key Programs and Initiatives that Support Community Schools and Children and Youth:
 - Full-Service Community Schools Program: at least \$30 million
 - 21st Century Community Learning Centers: \$1.32 billion
 - Title IV-A Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant: \$1.6 billion
 - Title II of ESSA: \$2.295 billion
 - Full Funding for IDEA
- 2) The DIPLOMA Act (H.R. 7204 from 115th Congress), to be reintroduced this Congress, which provides five-year grants to states and local consortia to develop and implement a child and youth strategy that assesses children's needs and the assets within the state/community that can be mobilized, coordinated, and integrated to achieve quantifiable progress toward a broad set of results for children and youth.
- 3) Full-Service Community Schools in Distressed Communities Act (S. 3362 from 115th Congress), to be reintroduced this Congress, which provides \$45 million to communities impacted by substance abuse to create collaborative leadership structures that promote cross-sector collaboration, and to implement the community school strategy in two or more schools most impacted by substance abuse and issues relating to poverty.
- 4) Protection of student loan forgiveness programs and expanding eligibility to include community school coordinators.
- 5) Strengthening the pipeline of high-capacity adults to work in high-need schools and communities.

Thank you for your consideration, and please feel free to contact me as a resource.

Sincerely,
(Name)

Action 3: Grow a Champion

We encourage you to reach out during this month to one or more of your elected officials to schedule a meeting with them for a date that is mutually convenient for you both (whether this occurs in March or later). Think about which elected officials at the local and state levels show the most potential/interest to become a champion for children and youth based on their track record/priorities/current support for community schools, and pursue a meeting with them. The goal of this action, meeting with an elected official, is to help them first build awareness, and then support, for the specific policies and funding you are asking them to champion to increase equity and opportunity for your community's children and youth. The elected official could be a school board member, city councilor, county commissioner, mayor, state legislator, or governor.

Please find below guidance on scheduling and executing a successful meeting with your elected official. We encourage you to follow the guidance provided.

Tips for Scheduling a Meeting with your Elected Official

- Contact the elected official's office and ask to speak with the appointment secretary/scheduler.
- Explain whom you represent (community school/organization) and the reason you want a meeting with the representative (to share with them the positive impact your community school/organization is having for children/youth, families, and communities). Ask the scheduler how you can arrange a meeting. Request a meeting the week of March 18-22 if possible.
- If your elected official is unavailable for a meeting, consider requesting a meeting with the appropriate staff. The staff of elected officials have a significant influence on an elected official's priorities and can relay your information and become an advocate for your work to your elected officials.
- If you would like to invite the elected official to a site visit the following week (March 25-29), also mention this to the scheduler.

Tips for Preparing for a Meeting with your Elected Official

- If possible, invite one or two more people to attend the meeting who can speak first hand to the positive impact of community schools: a student, parent, teacher, community partner, etc.
- Prepare talking points, or items you want to make certain you share with your elected official. This should include a brief overview of your community school/organization, anecdotes and statistics demonstrating impact, and a specific policy ask.
- Determine your "ask" for your elected official. Is it more funding for community schools or for related programs, legislation, or even raising with them certain barriers to success that could be addressed through policy or funding?
- Also invite them to come by and visit your community school. Be very clear and specific about your ask and practice stating this ask before the meeting. If they don't immediately say yes, don't give up! Consider this a relationship you're starting and this is the first of many conversations you will have with them to build their support.

- Prepare helpful materials to share with your elected official and their staff to better understand the impact of your community school/organization. Infographics, videos, data, quotes, and pictures are especially powerful.

Tips for Conducting a Successful Meeting with your Elected Official

- Arrive early to get settled. Chat with your elected officials' staff and review your talking points.
- At the start of the meeting, thank the elected official for their time to talk with you.
- State up front what you would like to discuss, and what your “ask” is (see above).
- Ask your elected official how familiar they are with the community school strategy. Then give a brief overview of community schools based on their level of understanding. Feel free to use some messaging from the Community Schools Playbook.
- Describe your community school/initiative/organization. How many children/youth and families are impacted? Share your successes, including one or two stories and some data/statistics on things like attendance, family engagement, academic achievement, participation in out of school time activities, etc.
- Pause to see if your elected official has any questions or comments.
- Share your “ask” with your elected official. If they say yes to your ask, express your thanks and discuss any next steps. If they say I’m not sure/maybe, ask them if they have any questions you can help clarify in order for them to support your ask. If they say no/not right now, ask them what is preventing them from being able to support your ask. Listen carefully to their response and see if you can address any of their concerns/points.
- Thank them again for the meeting and say you look forward to staying in touch to share more about your work and how it’s helping children/youth, families and communities.
- Personally invite them to your scheduled site visit, or on a site visit in the future if you do not have a site visit planned.
- Within a few days of the meeting, email your elected official and/or the relevant staff person and thank them again for the meeting, and offer yourself as a resource moving forward to learn more about community schools.
- Remember: this is the beginning of a relationship that you will continue to strengthen!

Action 4: Host a Site Visit

While hosting a site visit may be the heaviest lift of all the actions in terms of effort, it also has the greatest impact. In seeing a community school and what happens there in-person, elected officials often become champions on the spot. We encourage you to extend an invitation to your elected official during this month, and schedule a site visit for a date that is mutually convenient for you both, even if it is after March. Once again, we encourage you to invite the elected officials at your local or state level who show the greatest potential to become a community school champion. If the elected official is not available for several weeks/months, extend the invitation to their staff, who have a great deal of influence on policy as well. Consider inviting the media as well to seek coverage of your school and the visit; if you do invite the media, let your elected official know in advance.

During the site visit, tweet pictures using the hashtags #CommunitySchools and #March4Youth and tag the Coalition (@commschools) and IEL (@ielconnects) to share your great advocacy.

We encourage you to use the guidance and templates below to assist you in planning and executing a successful site visit.

Scheduling and Hosting a Successful Site Visit

The following steps provide a guide to schedule and carry out a successful site visit:

Step 1

- It's up to you which elected officials you want to target: federal, state, and/or local. You can invite all or some of them, depending on the level of attention you want to be able to give them. Prioritize the elected official(s) who demonstrate the most potential to be a champion for community schools.

Step 2

- Contact your elected officials: Call their office.

- Tell the scheduler/legislative aide that you would like to schedule a tour of your community school for the policymaker to attend.

- Offer the week of March 25-29 as your preferred dates. If your elected official is not available, see if a staff person can visit instead. If neither your elected official nor a staff member can do the week of March 25-29, offer a few other dates during March that work for your school.

- Keep in mind that elected officials' schedules can change without notice. Several days before your scheduled visit, call to confirm the site visit and have alternate dates in case you need to reschedule.

- Remember also that sometimes an elected official will not be able to participate in the visit, but a staffer will. Staffers are responsible for sharing information and making recommendations to elected officials. They play essential roles, and it can be very impactful having a staffer participate in a site visit as well.

Step 3

- Before the visit, identify and secure youth, parents, program staff, school officials, and community partners who would be convincing spokespeople for your school/initiative/organization.

- Once you have identified the spokespeople to represent your community school, give them any background material you have on the policy maker so they will feel comfortable meeting them. This is a good opportunity to share the schedule of the site visit and clarify their roles.

- Determine your "ask" of the elected official. Is it more funding for community schools or for related programs, legislation, or even raising with them specific barriers to success that could be addressed through policy or funding? Be very clear and specific about your ask, and be sure that what you show them and talk about on the site visit connects to this ask.

Step 4

- Congratulations! It's the day of the site visit.
- Have a fact sheet on your school to give attendees. Include information that demonstrates the reach and impact your community school has on children, youth, families, and the surrounding community.
- Take pictures of the visit and post on social media including Twitter. Use the hashtags #CommunitySchools and #March4Youth in your tweets so we can know about your site visit. Consider inviting the local media as well to cover the site visit. Ask the staff of your elected official if they are comfortable with this. It's also likely that a communications staffer of your elected official may attend.
- After the visit ends, send a thank you email to your elected official for attending the site visit and offer yourself as a resource moving forward for learning more about community schools.

Suggested Timeline to Prepare for a Site Visit

Time Prior to Visit	Activity
3-4 weeks	Invite Elected Official/Staff to visit your community school. Call the Elected Official's office and follow up with an email. Follow up with a call if you don't hear back in a few days.
3 weeks	Invite parents, community members, school officials, and youth to participate in the site visit and explain the specific roles you would like them to play. Explain the purpose of the visit and share a little background information on the elected official and his/her priorities to prepare all participants. Work with the principal to ensure the visit minimizes disruption to learning that day.
2 weeks	Develop a detailed schedule for the visit. Ask your principal to inform the entire school staff so they are prepared. Invite the media if your elected official/staff is comfortable with that.
1 week	Finalize program agenda and materials to share with the Elected Official/staff. See below for a sample information sheet for your school that you can prepare. Meet with other people who will participate in the visit (principal, coordinator, teachers, parents, and students) to review their roles, talking points, and address any questions or concerns. Call your Elected Official's office to confirm the visit.
Day of Visit	Have a fact sheet available to distribute. Do not forget to have your camera ready to take pictures. Walk the tour yourself in advance to make sure everything is in order and that you deliver your intended message.

Sample Schedule – Day of Site Visit

Note: This schedule is based on a one-hour visit from an elected official. The available time your elected official has will vary, so be prepared to lengthen or shorten this schedule as needed. What you should strive to include in your site visit, regardless of how much time you have, is three things: 1) a brief tour of the school that highlights the innovative components of your community school; 2) a discussion with the principal, coordinator, and other key people including students, teachers/school staff, parents, and community partners on the impact of the community school. This can be achieved efficiently through a moderated panel discussion. This discussion should weave in your “ask” of the policymaker (e.g. continued/increased funding for certain programs; sponsoring legislation to fund and expand community schools, etc.); and 3) time for the elected official to ask questions and learn more about any particular aspects of the school and the community school strategy that interests them.

Time	Activity
10:00 AM	Elected Official/Staff arrives at the community school and is greeted by Principal, Coordinator, or another leadhost.
10:05-10:15 AM	Lead the Elected Official/Staff on a tour of the school. Choose areas that demonstrate the impact of your community school on the academic, social, health and well being of your students.
10:15-10:30 AM	Introduce Elected Official/Staff to students. Ask them to talk about their experience at the community school.
10:30-10:45 AM	Facilitate a discussion between Elected Official/Staff and school staff and parents. Ask school staff and parents to share how the programs and initiatives housed at the community school helps their students/children/families.
10:45-11:00 AM	Ask the school Principal and Resource Coordinator to talk about school-wide improvement attributable to the community school. Ask the resource coordinator to explain their vital role to lead coordination at the school site. Share your policy or funding "ask" with your elected official that connects to what they saw during this site visit. Follow up with a thank you email.

Sample One-Page School Profile for an Elected Official



Benjamin Franklin High School at Masonville Cove in Baltimore moved from one of the city's lowest-performing high schools to one of Baltimore's top choice high schools between 2011 and 2015. From an early childhood education program for parenting teens to workforce development for community members, a network of over 75 partners customize responses to needs presented by students and families. Students clocked more than 17,000 service learning hours several years ago and are credited for stopping the building of a waste incinerator near their campus through community organizing.

Demographics	Results
Location: Baltimore, MD Grade Levels: 9-12 Number of Students: 437 Race/Ethnicity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American 51% • Asian American 1% • Caucasian 25% • Hispanic 23% ELL • Students: 15% Special Education: 27% • Free/Reduced Lunch: 85% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 2011 to 2015 BFHS moved from one of Baltimore's lowest-performing high schools to one of Baltimore's top choice high schools • Students posted approximately 17,000 service learning hours in school year 2013-2014 • Students organized to stop the building a waste incinerator to be built less than a mile from the school • 60 families have been prevented from becoming homeless • 89% of students indicated they learned a lot at school • 95% parents would recommend the school to others