

# MARCH FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH MONTH PLAYBOOK



Institute for  
Educational  
Leadership

60+  
Years Strong



## Introduction

Since 1997, the [Institute for Educational Leadership](#) has mobilized the [Coalition for Community Schools](#) to lead 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 by our partners at First Focus for Children in 2017 as an annual campaign to concentrate our advocacy efforts among our national, state and local partners. Our collective advocacy as a Coalition is important to build champions among our policymakers for policies and funding that support children and youth. We can no longer sit on the sidelines and hope others advocate for more equitable conditions in schools - it must be us, it must be now, and we must speak with one voice.

During this campaign, reach out to your policymakers and share your stories and the impact of Community Schools. Join us during this month to raise our voices together to create opportunities 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 three different examples of actions you can participate in throughout the month:

1. [Share your Community Schools story during our LinkedIn-Storm](#) (March 16 - 20)
2. Host a Legislative Day (Meet with an elected official and/or staff)
3. 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 three actions (it is our hope you can participate in all of them). While the first action takes place week one (March 16 - 20), the others 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	Medium-High	High
<b>Action</b>	Post using sample social media	Host a Legislative Day (meet with an elected official)	Host a site visit

Take a look at the chart on the previous page 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 actions, as well as resources ranging from sample posts 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 of them 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: Share your Community School Story During our LinkedIn-Storm (March 16 -20)**

LinkedIn Storm: From March 16 -20, post every day with these sample posts from the Coalition, as well as with details about the impact Community Schools are making in your state. Make sure to use the hashtags [#CommunitySchools](#) and [#March4Youth](#) and tag IEL at [@ielconnects](#). Don't forget to tag your elected officials (members of Congress LI handles can be found [here](#), and see if your state officials have LI pages or other social accounts as well). We also invite you to craft posts and share examples of how the Community Schools in your community help children, youth, and families. Post about how these particular programs and policies support the work that you want your elected officials to fund.

## **Action 2: Host a Legislative Day**

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. Think about which elected officials at the state level 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 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. The elected official could be a 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.

- 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 your elected official is unavailable to meet in person, they may have more flexibility to meet virtually, so ask their staff about virtual meeting options as well.

## 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 to their lived experience, such as 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. It could be for more funding to support Community Schools or related programs, partnership in removing barriers to success, to sponsor a resolution or proclamation in support of Community Schools, or a commitment to learn more about the Community School strategy.
- Invite policymakers to come by and visit your Community School. Be 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 or, if meeting virtually, ensure you have a good Internet connection and are in a space with limited background noise and good lighting. 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 a site visit.
- 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 3: 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. By seeing a Community School and what happens there in person, elected officials often become champions on the spot. 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 too - if you do, let your elected official know in advance.

During the site visit, post pictures using the hashtags #CommunitySchools and #March4Youth and tag IEL to share your advocacy activities.

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

- Prioritize inviting 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 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 your preferred dates, offer a few other dates during the spring 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. For example, 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 LI. Use the hashtags #CommunitySchools and #March4Youth in your posts 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 the next page for a sample info 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 to coordinate any logistics such as parking, security protocols, etc. Call your Elected Official's office to confirm.
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 lead host.
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.  <b>Follow up with a thank you email.</b>

***All of the above advocacy strategies can also be used reach out to your state assembly leaders, state superintendents, and school board members too!***

## **Bonus Actions: Get your students and school board involved**

Federal and state leaders aren't the only people who can make a difference. Here are a few ideas to expand your advocacy further:

- If you work with students or educators at a Community School, incorporate civic engagement into the curriculum! Help educate them about advocacy, and involve them in outreach - whether on the federal, state, or local level.
- Students can help illustrate the power of Community Schools by drawing a picture about why they love their school, writing an essay, or even submitting public comment at a school board meeting to discuss issues at their school that the Community School strategy can help with.