



# Hosting Your Elected Officials

A TOOLKIT FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

# Why You Should Host Elected Officials on Your Campus

(AND HOW THE TEXAS CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION CAN HELP)

**Building long-term relationships with your elected officials is crucial for both your school and the entire Texas charter school community.** Elected Officials have the ability to influence how public charter schools are funded, how they operate, and how they are regulated. They also have the ability to stand up to anti-charter proposals that would stop new schools from opening or impose mountains of red tape and regulations.

A school visit can leave a lasting impression on an elected official that improves their understanding of your school and public charter schools in general. TCSA knows lawmakers that were previously considered anti-charter but because of a school visit that made an impression have decided to support and stand up for public charter schools in their district.

Hosting an elected official can take as little as an hour of your day, and planning a visit doesn't need to be intimidating. This toolkit will help guide you through the process. While the information that follows is geared toward inviting your state representatives and state senators to your school, the same tips and practices can be used when inviting Members of Congress, the Governor, Mayors, City Members, and other leaders across Texas.

As you invite and host your elected officials, keep in mind that we are here to help. Contact us any time in the process at [advocacy@txcharterschools.org](mailto:advocacy@txcharterschools.org) or (512) 584-8272 and ask to speak to a member of our advocacy team who specializes in your region.

Thank you for taking the initiative to host an elected official at your school. Together, we can make Texas an even better state for public charter schools while continuing to serve the students who need us most.

# School Visit Checklist

THIS CHECKLIST ADDRESSES THE KEY ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL CAMPUS VISIT.



## STEP 1: Invite the Elected Official and Schedule the Visit

- Invite your elected official
- Schedule the visit



## STEP 2: Plan the Visit

- Create an agenda and timeline for the visit
- Select and prepare voices to tell your school's story
- Gather materials
- Plan for the media
- Prep the elected official



## STEP 3: Host the Elected Official

- Welcome your guest to your campus
- Conduct tour and discussion
- Take photos



## STEP 4: Follow Up

- Promote the visit on social media
- Send press release
- Thank the elected official
- Continue to cultivate your relationship with the elected official and their staff

### KEEP US POSTED!

If you have confirmed a school visit with an elected official, please let us know!



Call the Texas Charter Schools Association at **(512) 584-8272** and ask to speak with a member of our advocacy team who specializes in your region.



Email the Texas Charter Schools Association at **advocacy@txcharterschools.org**.



## STEP 1: Invite the Official and Schedule the Visit

### SENDING THE INVITATION

#### Inviting a local elected official

Plan to send your invitation a few months in advance of the planned visit as this process may take some time to complete.

The most efficient way to invite an elected official is to call their district office directly (TCSA can help you identify elected officials in your district as well as provide contact information) and ask who the best person is for them to schedule a school visit. Once you have the name, request their email and direct line. From here, prepare the invitation and send it to the appropriate person via email.

If you have not heard back from the individual within a week, either send a follow up via email or call the person directly to confirm that they received your invitation and to ask if they have any questions that you can answer regarding the visit. A sample invitation is available on page 11.

### SCHEDULING THE VISIT

Schedule the visit for a time when you are able to showcase specific classrooms and bring select students and parents to meet with lawmakers. You want to show off your best!

Finding a time that works well for both your school and your elected official can be one of the hardest parts of hosting a school visit. After the elected official's office responds to your initial invitation, follow-up with a few different dates and times that you are available. When an elected official's office confirms a visit with you, ask whether anyone else from their office will be attending with the official and ask who the best contact is from their office to coordinate media outreach.

Make yourself a note to contact their office one week ahead of the scheduled visit to reconfirm the visit and to share the agenda with them.



**PRO TIP:** For state lawmakers, it's best to schedule a school visit for a time outside of the biannual legislative session. The legislative session is an extremely busy time and their schedules aren't as flexible.

If an office declines your invitation, don't be discouraged! Elected officials are busy, and sometime scheduling conflicts can prevent them from visiting schools. If an office declines your invitation due to scheduling, ask them to provide a few dates that would work. Once you have a date selected, confirm it with the elected official's office and begin planning. If you are unable to schedule a visit this time, thank the office for their response and offer to follow up in the future. You have already contacted the office, and this is a success on its own. In the future, you can contact this staff person directly to invite the official to graduations, community celebrations, and more.





## STEP 2: Plan the Visit

### SETTING THE AGENDA

Spend time thinking about what you want to accomplish when the elected official tours your campus.

Consider arranging for certain students, parents, faculty, board members, or staff to meet the elected official and discuss their experiences at your public charter school. Remember to highlight any unique features of your school. You want to ensure the campus visit is memorable.

Popular items to consider (you can usually pick at least two activities off this list):

- ☐ A general tour of your campus
- ☐ Classroom or student activity observation
- ☐ Any special events on your campus the elected official might appreciate
- ☐ A roundtable conversation with a key individuals and the elected official

A sample agenda is included on page 12.

### SELECTING AND PREPARING VOICES

You should identify a few key voices to interact with your elected official and help show off your school.

You might consider:

- ☐ Top performing teachers and staff
- ☐ Highly engaged parents (especially those that have a compelling reason for choosing your charter school)
- ☐ Poised and well-spoken students (Consider students who have shown great academic improvement, behavioral improvement, a dedication to their school, or who have recently represented the school in academic or athletic conferences or competitions)
- ☐ Board members

No matter who you choose, make sure that everyone attending has a copy of the agenda, any talking points, and activities planned during the visit and that everyone has signed relevant media releases and waivers for photography. If you do not have media waivers, TCSA can provide you with a form.



**PRO TIP:** In order to avoid the likelihood that some parents may wish to speak with officials on unrelated issues, we recommend against a blanket notification to all parents concerning the visit.



**PRO TIP:** If you want to discuss specific policies with the elected official, contact TCSA for help. We can provide background on the issue and may have some resources such as one pagers or talking points to make this easier.

## GATHERING MATERIALS

For the elected official, their staff, and any media that attend, you should be prepared to hand out information about public charter schools and your school. TCSA recommends the following:

- ☐ One page fact sheet on your school (including mission, year founded, number of students served, number of schools/campuses, highlights of what make your program unique, honors you've received, and academic results)
- ☐ One page document with biographies of anyone the official will be meeting with (teachers, board members, staff, students)
- ☐ *What is a Charter School?* brochure\*
- ☐ [Charter Schools 101 one-pager](#)\*
- ☐ [Truth About Texas Charters report](#)\*

## PLANNING FOR THE MEDIA

When hosting an elected official at your school, it is ultimately their decision whether press should be involved.

However, before you suggest or ask you must first decide if the media is appropriate for their visit. The Texas Charter Schools Association can help determine whether inviting the media is appropriate and if so, help develop a media plan.

If you decide media is appropriate, below are a few questions to ask the official's office in advance of the visit:

- ☐ Are you comfortable with us inviting reporters to attend the visit?
- ☐ Do you plan to bring a photographer and are you comfortable with us sharing photos from the visit on our social media channels or with the press?
- ☐ Are you willing to provide a quote for us to use in a press release and would you be willing to speak to any interested reporters?
- ☐ Do you plan to issue your own press release or advisory?

The Texas Charter Schools Association has a database of local press contacts who can be invited to these visits if deemed appropriate. We are happy to share these contacts with you as you prepare for the official's visit. Please contact the TCSA Advocacy Team at [advocacy@txcharterschools.org](mailto:advocacy@txcharterschools.org) to request a list and to discuss how to handle media for an elected official visit.

\*These documents are available from TCSA; contact us at (512) 584-8272 and we will be happy to provide them to you.

• If the official approves of media outreach, here are some materials you may need to produce. It  
• is a good idea to put all of these on your school's letterhead and to get approval from the elected  
• official's office prior to distribution.

• ☐ **Media Advisory:** A brief notice to the media about an upcoming event or announcement. The  
• advisory will concisely list the date, time, location, and purpose of the event, participants, and  
• on-site contact information. This should be sent out two to three days before the event. A sample  
• can be found on page 13.

• ☐ **Press Release:** A written communication announcing news that is sent to media. This usually  
• contains a point of contact for further media inquiries or requests, and quotes from those  
• associated with the event. This should be sent out the day of the event, usually immediately after.  
• A sample can be found on page 14.

• If there are particular reporters or members of the media you want to attend, contact them  
• individually several days before the visit to ask if they can attend.



### STEP 3: Host the Elected Official

Most of the hard work is done! In addition to following the agenda you set and shared, you might want to include a few welcoming touches:

- ☐ Reserve parking spaces or assign someone to show them where to park
- ☐ Have students create a welcome sign
- ☐ Provide bottles of water or coffee on arrival

Be flexible and have fun! Stick to your plan, but allow for some flexibility — your elected official might wish to deviate from the agenda just a bit.





## STEP 4: Follow Up

### PROMOTE THE VISIT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Depending on the media coordination you established with the elected official's office, taking pictures for social media during the visit can be a great way to raise the profile of your public charter school and the visit. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are great outlets to share photos and information from the visit.

Don't forget to include the Texas Charter Schools Association when you are sharing your photos! Tag TCSA (see back page for our social media handles) or send us your photos directly at [advocacy@txcharterschools.org](mailto:advocacy@txcharterschools.org). Additionally, remember to tag the elected official's social media accounts. Sample social media posts are included on page 15.

### SEND OUT PRESS RELEASE (IF APPLICABLE)

After the event, you may want to issue a press release announcing the recent visit and recap any key moments. This publicity allows you to share photos from the event, as well as include a quote from the elected official and/or your school leader. It also allows you to keep the conversation going with your media contacts. You should prepare the release in advance and aim to send it out shortly after the event concludes. Be sure to monitor the media for coverage. A sample press release is included on page 14.

### SAY "THANK YOU"

After the visit is complete, send a formal hard copy thank you letter to the elected official's office within 24 hours. Sending an email to thank the staff that supported the coordination of the visit is also recommended. Be sure to include photos, recap highlights of the visit, and restate any requests made for improving Texas charter school policy. Be sure to ask any questions that needed to be asked but weren't, and provide answers to any questions asked during the visit that need follow-up. A sample thank you letter is provided on page 16.

### CULTIVATE THE RELATIONSHIP

Most importantly, continue to cultivate your relationship by staying in contact with your elected official. You can do this by periodically sending a personal note that includes positive stories about your school. Another way is to include them on your school's mailing lists for newsletters and other correspondence. You can also use the email address of the staff member who attended the visit for electronic communications such as announcements, press releases, and information about major accomplishments. This helps to keep them fully informed about your school's successes and about issues facing your school and community.

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### Sample Invitation

Dear [title] [last name],

On behalf of all of us at [charter school name], I would like to invite you to visit our campus on [date/time] to [insert planned activities]. During your visit, you will have the chance to meet [insert staff, parents, etc.] and learn more about how our charter school is making a difference in the lives of children, their families, and our community.

As you may already know, [charter school name] serves [XX] children and [insert history, other highlights]. We are proud of our school and would love for you to see our amazing students and their work first hand.

Thank you for your consideration of our invitation. My number is [XXX-XXX-XXXX]. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[signed name]

[printed name], [title]

[name of school]

[school address]

[phone]

[email]

## Sample Agenda

Schedule for [name of elected official]

**123 Charter School**

**[123 Charter School Lane, Austin, Texas 78704]**

[date]

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>9:00am</b>  | Senator arrives at main entrance.<br>[staff lead] will greet Senator and briefly introduce staff, student ambassador, other VIPs invited to the tour.                            |
| <b>9:05am</b>  | Senator and [staff lead] will begin tour of school   |
| <b>9:10am</b>  | Senator will visit the science laboratory to speak with graduating seniors about their interest in STEM careers and their college plans  |
| <b>9:30am</b>  | Senator will meet with parents and families of [name of school] in the auditorium to discuss their experience with charter schools, to tell their stories.                       |
| <b>9:45am</b>  | Senator and [staff lead] (as well as any other staff or VIP on tour) will discuss the achievements of [school] and the role policymakers can play in supporting charter schools. |
| <b>10:00am</b> | Tour ends and Senator exits through main entrance.   |

### Sample Media Advisory

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For Planning Purposes

[month and day], 2019

Media Contact:

[name of communications liaison], [title], [name of public charter school]

[phone number] / [email]

#### Media Advisory

State Senator/Representative/Mayor, etc. [name] to Visit [name of public charter school]

[City], TX -- On [day of week], [month, day], at [time], [title] [name] will visit [name of school] to tour the school and observe a [grade level] classroom. The one-hour visit will also provide an opportunity for Senator [name] to interact with parents, staff, and students. Members of the media are welcome to attend, but are required to register in advance.

WHO: State Senator [name], [party affiliation, district number (R-20)]

WHAT: Senator [name] visits [name of school] to tour the campus, meet students, faculty and staff.

WHEN: [day of week], [month, day] at [time]

WHERE: [name of school] | [campus address]

RSVP: Media wishing to attend must register with [name] at [phone number] or [email address].

About [name of school]:

[Insert mission statement, "about us" section, etc.]

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## Sample Press Release

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For Immediate Release

[month and day], 2019

Media Contact:

[name of communications liaison], [title], [name of public charter school]

[phone number] / [email]

### State Senator [name] Visits [name of public charter school]

[City], Texas – Today, Senator [name], [party and district], visited with students and staff at [name of school] for a very special community celebration.

During the visit, Senator [name] toured the school [name of school] and met many students, faculty and staff. Senator [name] was able to observe classes, hear concerns from teachers, and participate in the celebratory activities, including presenting an award for Student of the Year! Senator [name] was also able to meet with parents and guardians of students at [name of school] and discuss why they chose a Texas public charter school for their child's education.

[quote from senator, if applicable]

[quote from principal, teacher, or parent]

[photos from visit]

[School name] is a public charter school in [city] serving [number of students].

[Insert "about us" section regarding the school]

To learn more about [school name], visit [school website].

###



## Sample Social Media

*Note: Be sure to replace “@Legislator” with the elected official’s actual social media handle.*

### Sample Tweets:

We’re thrilled to have @Legislator join us today for a campus tour and to meet with our students, faculty, and staff! #TXEd #txlege #ChartersWork @TCSAnews (insert photo)

.@Legislator sits in on a third-grade math class with Ms. Aguilar. #TXEd #txlege @TCSAnews

The [name of school] school board visits with @legislator to discuss how the state legislature can support public, tuition-free charter schools in Texas. #TXEd #ChartersWork @TCSAnews

Thank you @legislator for meeting with our students, faculty, and staff today and talking about how the #txlege can support #CharterSchools like ours! #TXEd #ChartersWork @TCSAnews

### Sample Facebook Posts:

Today, State Senator [name] visited our public charter school to meet with students and teachers and take a tour of the campus. He then sat down with our board members as they explained how the state legislature is a critical partner to public charter schools in Texas, and how the legislature can continue to support public charter schools like ours! Thank you, Senator [name], for the opportunity to share the story of our schools and families!

Why do families choose [school name] for their children? The same reason that Senator [name] came to visit us today—because we have something unique to offer! Senator [name] saw our classrooms, our art rooms, science lab, and got to observe a class in action. Thank you so much, Senator, for coming to learn more about our students, teachers, and families!

**Sample Thank You Letter to Elected Official**

The Honorable [name]

Street Address

City, State, Zip

Dear [Senator/Representative (name)]:

On behalf of the students and staff at the [school name], I would like to thank you for taking your time to visit. The students and staff were thrilled to host you and we hope you can visit us again soon.

I hope you enjoyed your visit, the tour of the school, and interacting with our third-grade students while they continued their studies. Our community is thrilled that you would take the time to learn more about the importance of public charter schools and the benefits they bring to the students and parents of our community.

I want to reiterate how important your support for public charter schools is to our school, students, and community.

Again, thank you for taking your time to visit the [name of school]. We look forward to hosting you again and working toward our mutual goal of providing a quality education to Texas students.

Sincerely,

[name]

[title]

[name of school]

[school address]

[phone number]

[email]



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