Thank you for all that you do for the nation’s students. Education is our calling and nobody knows better than us how to meet students’ needs.

As educators, we believe that every student deserves the opportunity to succeed, utilize their gifts, and fulfill their purpose. Over the last decade whether you were serving or preparing to serve in the classroom, working in the school front office, or driving the school bus, you have experienced the results of a top-down, test-obsessed education system that virtually ignored the needs of students and the experienced voice of educators.

Moving forward we have an opportunity to have our say and co-create educational environments that foster students’ natural curiosity, imagination, and love of learning. As you have heard, the federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced the No Child Left Behind Act, offers educators, families, and communities an unprecedented opportunity to lend their voice to local education planning and policies. Right now, educators across the country are using this moment to push for specific measures that we know will benefit our students and ensure the very opportunities to help them succeed.

Facilitating and maintaining local collaboration between educators, families, and communities is important work. So NEA has created the My School, My Voice Family & Community Engagement Kit to help. Working together we can build a strong network to ensure that public schools are adequately resourced, students have the educators they need, more one-on-one attention is available, and access to a well-rounded curriculum is widespread. The tools and resources contained in this kit are designed to stimulate local conversation, set priorities, and organize pressing issues into a longstanding advocacy framework.

No student’s future should be left to chance. When we work closely with families and communities on policies that help children, the result is stronger, safer, and engaging public schools that prepare every student for a great future.

All of the materials in this kit are available at http://myschoolmyvoice.nea.org/. If you have questions or need additional assistance, please email ESSAinfo@nea.org.
Tools for educators to engage families and communities in support of students and public schools

In your hands is a comprehensive collection of NEA resources for local engagement of families and the community. Across the country, school districts and schools are developing local plans to contribute to state goals – goals outlined in state plans for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Collaboration among families, educators, and communities is at the heart of ESSA, and it is our collective input that will ultimately drive its success and the success of our students and public schools.

The resources contained in this kit answer three questions: (1) Where do I start? (2) What do I need? (3) How do I bring everyone together?

Where do I start?
These materials set the stage for engaging families and communities and provide an overview of tools.
- Welcome letter
- Family and Community Engagement Check Up Exercise
- My School, My Voice Resources Snapshot

What do I need?
The following resources have been compiled for you to start local conversations and lead collaboration on specific approaches that benefit students.
- Opportunity Checklist: short tool to assess what’s available to students in your school
- Your Voice Matters Conversation Starters: talking points to discuss how ESSA will impact students and classrooms
- School Improvement—What Educators Need to Know: overview of the process and responses to when schools are identified for improvement

How do I bring everyone together?
Use these materials to complement and organize your events. Know who wants to help and stay involved.
- My School, My Voice Host Instructions: step-by-step meeting suggestions, including a sample agenda
- How to Complete the Opportunity Checklist: a quick one-pager to help educators, families, and community leaders collaborate for public education
- Understanding the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — A Guide for Families: an interactive brochure on current education opportunities
- School Improvement in your Community: a short summary of the school improvement process
- Parent Guides: a series of brochures based on the seven criteria that define a great public school
- Promotion and Decoration: buttons, sticky notes, note pad, stickers (1 roll), writing pens, and rubber bracelets
A discussion guide for local family and community engagement

How local school districts and schools approach families and the community matters. Building relationships takes time and the growing diversity of our communities makes it even more important. If local engagement policies are on the books, but not supported or implemented in earnest, our students pay a price.

As you invite local families and the community to talk about your school, take time with your colleagues to discuss the following questions. Your answers may shed additional light on how families and communities are feeling and help you prepare for your conversations with them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check Up Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Comments and Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Has your local school district adopted formal policies that promote family involvement and emphasize engaging families that represent the diversity of the student population?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are educators provided the time to work with families and develop systems for making outreach to families a priority?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are immigrant families supported in understanding how schools work and is information available to them in a language that further helps them understand what schools expect from them?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are families included as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Are community resources aligned so that services for families, students, and schools provide a connection to businesses, local agencies, and faith and non-profit groups?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA Tool</td>
<td>Intended Audience</td>
<td>Intended Use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Checklist</td>
<td>Members, families, community members</td>
<td>First step in engagement to conduct an entry-level needs assessment at the school level with families and community members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation Starters</td>
<td>Members and local leaders</td>
<td>A series of talking points for members and leaders to use as they speak about issues relating to implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and educator voice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Audit</td>
<td>Members and school level leaders</td>
<td>A needs assessment tool to gain a deeper understanding of issues at the school level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocating for Great Public Schools</td>
<td>Members and local leaders</td>
<td>A toolkit to support members and local leaders through advocacy work at the local/district level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising Your Voice</td>
<td>Members and local leaders</td>
<td>A guide to support local association efforts to ensure educators have a seat at the table—required under ESSA—where decisions affecting public schools and students are made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement Brochure</td>
<td>Members and school level leaders</td>
<td>Offers educators an overview of the process of school identification, responses, and ways to participate and communicate with families.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Great public schools engage with families and communities to collaborate on learning, advocacy, and securing resources. Hosting a My School, My Voice meeting is a great way to work together to make these important decisions. The transformation into a great public school requires leadership and we are thrilled you are taking the lead. It starts with one small step: getting buy-in at the school level. Below, you will find helpful instructions and a sample agenda.

**HOW TO PLAN YOUR MEETING**

**Three weeks before your meeting:**

- Complete the *Opportunity Checklist*. This will familiarize you with the digital resources that participants receive after the meeting.

- Talk to other interested educators or someone from your school’s administration, to find out about relevant materials, upcoming events, and parent groups in your school community.

- Attend an upcoming community or school meeting, where you can network and gather contact information. Ask for time to speak at their next meeting or invite them to your own My School, My Voice meeting. Flexibility is key here! Consider if you use an existing structure or create your own to organize with families and community members.

- Secure a meeting date, time, and location that is best for your school community if you are hosting your own meeting. Is the meeting at a time that can accommodate most work schedules, such as before or after school? Will you have access to a projector, tables, chairs, and space to provide snacks?

**Two weeks before your meeting:**

- Personally contact families and community leaders to invite them to your upcoming meeting. Prepare a 30 second ask explaining why you care about your school community and why they should attend your meeting. A sample script is provided below to help:

  **Facilitator:** “Hello ___ (their name), how are you? I recently filled out the *Opportunity Checklist* and noticed important areas where we can grow. I have been a part of this school community for ____ (time period) and know that we can be a great public school. Can you join me to discuss how at the My School, My Voice meeting on ____ (day and time) happening in ____ (location)? We will have discussion, snacks, and talk next steps (Pause for response). Great! I look forward to seeing you there.”

- If you are connected to a larger school, you may want to ask a couple of committed parents or other educators to assist you in inviting people to the upcoming meeting over the course of a few days.
A week before your meeting:

- Send out a reminder email to your contact list for those who agreed to participate; send a separate email to the overall contact list with meeting logistics. You also may want to use social media to promote the meeting.
- Prepare to have plenty of snacks, and drinks, and verify building access, and technology support.
- Practice connecting people to why it is important to lead for great public schools: Can you tell your story in 60 seconds? What do you notice about opportunity in your school community? The Your Voice Matters: Conversation Starters may be helpful here.

The day before your meeting:

- Text and remind attendees about your My School, My Voice meeting.
- Print out needed My School, My Voice materials, meeting signs, and meeting flyers. Useful brochures, information about the new federal law, and other fun materials can be found in your My School, My Voice Family & Community Engagement Kit.
- Practice walking participants through filling out the Opportunity Checklist online with a laptop and phone at myschoolmyvoice.nea.org. This is the best way to complete the checklist, to ensure that participants receive resources directly based on their responses.

The day of your meeting:

- Begin setting up at least 45 minutes before the start time, leaving plenty of time if you are using technology. Place signs around the building, including those directing participants to the meeting room, and sign-in sheets in the front near snacks.
- As people arrive, welcome them and hand them a My School, My Voice commitment card. You will want to contact people afterward; similarly, you will want to follow up with those who were unable to attend.
- Start your meeting on time! Honor everyone’s time and allow adequate time to discuss checklist responses.
- Participants can work with you to review responses and issues raised during your meeting.
- Remind everyone to fill out a commitment card! Again, this card is important as you consider next steps and follow up with your local association.

The day after your meeting:

- Send an email thanking everyone for attending and participating. This creates a positive impression and increases the likelihood of continued participation!
- Review the sign-in sheets and any notes that attendees left you during the meeting. People often write that they are interested in a certain topic or want to follow-up individually with a question. You may also be able to identify parents, students, educators, or neighbors who are passionate and willing to take on a leadership role with you.
- Follow up with your local education association, parent group, or community organization that you are part of to provide a meeting update. Invite them to join your efforts! Set a date to discuss next steps and additional My School, My Voice resources that are needed, e.g., the Opportunity Audit, for a closer look into issues identified using the checklist.
- Complete a brief survey (go to www.nea.org/eppfcesurvey), which registers you to receive the results of the Opportunity Checklists that were completed during the meeting and enables you to request additional supports that you may need for any follow up actions.
**The week after your meeting:**

- Identify a core group of parents, community organizations, and educators who participated in the initial meeting so that they can move the work forward. Invite them to a longer meeting, to review the Opportunity Checklist responses in greater detail.

- This core group will begin the process of using the Opportunity Audit, a My School, My Voice tool that identifies solutions through a needs assessment process.

---

**SAMPLE AGENDA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGENDA ITEM</th>
<th>DETAILS</th>
<th>GOALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Welcome & Introductions | Use this time to learn more about your participants and set goals for the meeting – to use the Opportunity Checklist to discuss the needs of the school community. | ➢ Have a sense of who is in the room.  
➢ Reiterate the importance of signing in and completing commitment cards.  
➢ Break the ice using an activity to engage all participants and build a sense of community. |
| Working Together: Filling out the Opportunity Checklist | You will want to open this time by explaining what you have identified as strengths and challenges within your school community.  
Show the Opportunity Checklist and explain that it is a short tool to learn more about what is available to students in your school. | ➢ Show participants where to find the Opportunity Checklist.  
➢ Complete the checklist as a group. |
| Group Discussion: Checklist Feedback & Experience | Select a few participants to share their results and discuss the experience of completing the checklist.  
Be open to frank conversation. | ➢ Lay the foundation for building a team.  
➢ Help participants feel comfortable discussing their feedback. |
| Next Steps: Creating Opportunity | Summarize some of the group’s findings and discussion.  
Explain this meeting is the beginning and that the group will meet again to flesh out their responses and create a plan of action together. | ➢ Reassure the group that this is a team and not a one-off meeting.  
➢ Remind participants to sign in, complete commitment cards and give them to the meeting host before leaving.  
➢ Allow that some people may not feel comfortable expressing themselves publicly. Offer to accept notes with additional feedback and comments. |
**Step 1:** Fire up your cell phone, computer or tablet

**Step 2:** Get on the Internet

**Step 3:** Go to: [myschoolmyvoice.nea.org](http://myschoolmyvoice.nea.org)

**Step 4:** Select Opportunity Checklist

**Step 5:** Evaluate your school on these 5 key areas:

- **Community:** Is your school open to the community it serves?
- **Healthy Students in Modern Schools:** Is your school a healthy learning environment that is clean and in good working order?
- **Well-Rounded Curriculum:** Do students have access to the courses that are right for them and prepare them for life after graduation?
- **School Climate:** Do your students feel safe and respected in their classrooms and in their school?
- **Quality Educators:** Are all of the educators at your school prepared and excited to help students excel?

**Step 6:** Click submit!
ORGANIZING FOR OPPORTUNITY:  
What Educators Need To Know

Why did we launch My School, My Voice?  
Education is our calling, and nobody knows better than us how to meet students’ needs. All schools should provide community support services like nutrition, health, and after-school programs for students who need it. As a group, we are helping educators, parents and community members push policymakers to focus on everything a student needs to succeed – not just test scores. Without pressure from us, school districts could privatize or make cuts that negatively affect some of our most vulnerable students.

We launched the My School, My Voice campaign to demand transparency and inclusion in the school improvement planning process. While the new law requires states to involve local stakeholders, we wanted to create a place where educators and the community could come together as a team to advance the needs of students and schools.

Who should get involved?  
Anyone who cares about quality public education can join our campaign to improve our local schools. As educators, we have a unique role because we have the experience and expertise to make the school and classroom decisions that lead to student success.

What are we asking for?  
We are asking local school districts to collaborate with us to create student-centered improvement plans. If we are organized, we can make sure schools develop plans that emphasize providing all students with the learning opportunities and support services—such as before-care and after-care—that they deserve, regardless of where they live.

What does participating in this campaign mean?  
Getting active in this campaign is simple. Just talk with your colleagues, parents and community members about building a vision for a better public school. Ask them to start by completing the Opportunity Checklist; a short, research- and criteria-based survey to help you identify your school’s gaps and needs. Get the checklist here: myschoolmyvoice.nea.org/your-school-checklist/

Interested in learning more?  
Learn more by visiting our My School, My Voice website at www.myschoolmyvoice.nea.org. We are excited to be working together to support our students’ public schools and communities!