



ADVOCACY

STARTER

TOOLKIT

THE EXPECTATIONS PROJECT

ADVOCACY STARTER TOOLKIT



In America today, we essentially have two separate and unequal school systems. In some public schools we see a future full of promise. Well supported staff. Challenging classes. High graduation rates. 80% of students from these schools will earn a college diploma. But for students growing up in poverty, public education often looks a lot different. Low expectations. High dropout rates. Fewer resources. Only half graduate from high school, and less than 10% go on to graduate from college.

These gaps in education quality are a nationwide problem that must primarily be solved locally. Pastors are among the best positioned group of people to lead the charge for change. There are more than 300,000 places of worship across America compared with roughly 23,000 high-poverty public schools, struggling to meet student needs — a ratio of 13 to 1. If churches fully embrace the cause of equitable schools for all of God’s children, the academic opportunity gap in U.S. public education can be closed in our lifetimes.

Many churches do tangibly love schools. Back-to-School backpack drives. Bake sale fundraisers. After-school mentoring programs. Healthy meals for students when school isn’t in session. High-quality preschool options for low-income kids. These are just some of the ways people of faith are showing God’s love and making a real difference for the students and schools in their community. Putting hands and feet to our faith is a central part of what it means to take our faith seriously. Scripture says, “What you do unto the least of these, you do unto me.”

All of this good work only takes us part of the way there, though. In order to truly transform our education system, we also need to address the broken policies that create the need for all of this compassionate service. We believe every pastor can multiply the effect of their love of our public schools by adding faithful advocacy to compassionate service. Faithful advocacy is about three things: 1) deepening your understanding about the issues at stake for kids; 2) learning more about concrete policy changes that are proven to make a difference; 3) joining other voices to let your leaders know that these issues matter to us and need to change.

“In America today, we essentially have two separate and unequal school systems.”

THE EXPECTATIONS PROJECT

We invite you to use the recommendations and resources in this guide to enhance your skills as a faithful advocate for our nation’s children.

HOW TO GET STARTED - checklist

- Complete the *Advocacy Resource Inventory* and *Advocacy Role Inventory* worksheets (pages 5-6)
- Do your education policy homework and get to know the schools in your community (page 8)
- Evaluate your level of involvement and/or get involved (page 10)
- Include your church (page 12-13)
- Let us know how it's going (page 14)

STEP ONE

- Complete the *Advocacy Resource Inventory* and *Advocacy Role Inventory* worksheets -

ADVOCACY RESOURCE INVENTORY - worksheet

These short planning worksheets will help you get an idea of what sort of change you want to see happen in your community's schools, the resources you need to accomplish it, and the resources you have. Once you've finished the worksheets, send it our way at brian@expectations.org. We'll help you think through next steps.

Name: _____ Date: _____

How long have you been interested in education equity issues? _____

How familiar are you with the state of schools in your area?

NOT FAMILIAR **SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR** **FAMILIAR** **VERY FAMILIAR**

How embedded are you in a low-income neighborhood and its schools?

NOT EMBEDDED **SOMEWHAT EMBEDDED** **VERY EMBEDDED**

How experienced are you in systemic advocacy?

NOT EXPERIENCED **SOMEWHAT EXPERIENCED** **EXPERIENCED** **VERY EXPERIENCED**

How involved has your church been in advocacy campaigns?

NOT INVOLVED **SOMEWHAT INVOLVED** **INVOLVED** **VERY INVOLVED**

In what advocacy issues, if any, has your church been involved?

What interests you in your area schools?

What change would you like to see happen in your area schools? Why?

INVENTORY WORKSHEETS CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

ADVOCACY ROLE INVENTORY - worksheet

Take a look at the list below of vital contributors to advocacy campaigns, and complete the worksheet. The roles you have on your team determine the type of advocacy action you can conduct. Who's on your team? Either check "ME" if you play this role, or write the name of someone you know in the relevant fields below.

ADVOCACY ROLE	ME	IN MY CONGREGATION	SOMEONE I KNOW IN TOWN
Students: They know what they are experiencing at school			
Concerned Parents: They know first hand what's happening in schools.			
The Policy Expert: They know the issues facing our schools			
Politically Connected: They know the people making the decisions			
The Networker: They know everyone around town, is good at connecting people to one another			
The Fashion Setter: People tend to adopt this person's causes			
The Mobilizer: They can get people in the streets, and get them organized			
Media Favorite: They have a knack for getting on the news or in the paper			
Pillar of the Community: Well trusted as someone who cares for the city			
The Fundraiser: They can find money when it's needed			

When you've filled out these two worksheets (Advocacy Role Inventory and Advocacy Role Inventory) assessing the problem you want to solve, the experience you have, and the team you can recruit, e-mail us at brian@expectations.org. We'll help you work out your next steps toward better schools in your community.

STEP TWO

- Do your education policy homework and get to know the schools in your community -

STEP TWO: DO YOUR HOMEWORK

1. Inform Yourself on Education Policy Issues

We all know that our schools have problems, but how do we make them better? Join the free [Expectations Project Resource Library](#) to access a collection of some of the best resources on the policy areas that could make a real difference in improving education for historically under-resourced students.

You'll find summaries, statistics, reports and news on the state of education in general, as well as on our priority issues: access to quality schools, high standards for all students, early childhood education, trauma-informed discipline, quality teachers and leaders, and the racial dynamics of education inequity.

If you're just beginning to learn about education policy, a good place to start is with the series of webinars in the 'Published by The Expectations Project' section of the [resource library](#); it will give you a great overview of each of these topics. If you're more familiar with education policy but want easy access to a curated selection of the best, up to date resources, make your way to the topic area tabs of the library.

TO ACCESS THE FREE RESOURCE LIBRARY: e-mail brian@expectations.org to register

2. Get to Know Your Local Schools Better

Here are some good ways to assess the issues facing the schools in your area:

School Report Cards: The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the new federal education law, requires that every school publish an annual report card containing an overall assessment of school quality, an overview of the school's performance on key metrics, and further details on each school's demographics and performance. Like any other report card, please examine it closely; go to the website of your state board of education to see how well your community's schools are serving their students.

Talk to students from low-performing schools and their parents: While the school report cards give a good birds' eye view of your local schools, talking to parents and students fills in the picture with an on the ground perspective. You probably know which schools near you are not serving their students well, by direct knowledge, by reputation, or from reading school report cards. Interview people impacted by these schools to hear their thoughts on what would make the biggest difference. You may know some of the students and parents in your own congregation. If not, there may be teachers and or other people in your network who know students and parents that you can listen to. To whatever extent is possible, make sure to listen to a racially, ethnically, and sociologically diverse group of parents from more than one school; odds are that you'll hear much different stories about the quality of and problems at the schools if you do.

Local News: Here's another good source of information about how the schools in your community are doing, highlighting any emergencies, controversies, or issues that already have momentum. The issues in the news may not always align with your interests, but they are good ways to kickstart your involvement.

STEP THREE

*- Evaluate Your Level of
Involvement and/or Get Involved -*

STEP THREE: EVALUATE YOUR INVOLVEMENT

With so much focus on what's happening nationally, local government is the political arena about which we tend to be least informed. However, critical change in government happens on this local level, even more in schools than other public policy areas. With this gap between level of engagement and possibility of impact, you can make a big difference by simply showing up.

If you're new to involving yourself with public policy, watch [*The Expectations Project's free Advocacy 101 webinar*](#) for suggestions on how to approach it. You can find the webinar under the 'Published by The Expectations Project' tab at our resource library (see STEP TWO earlier in this guide for more about our resource library).

The most important thing, though, is to commit to showing up where the decisions are made. Show up at school board meetings. Vote in local elections. Do so from an informed perspective on the candidates and the issues (this is where those local papers come in particularly handy). Eventually, you may even want to consider running for school board yourself.

If you are already politically involved, consider ways to enhance your involvement through new partnerships, different strategies for change and allowing younger people to lead and guide the work in fresh ways.

“The most important thing is to commit to showing up where the decisions are made.”

Whether you are new or a veteran, don't be dismayed. Remember that change often takes time. Substantive, lasting change happens gradually, over time and with wise strategy. So, settle yourself in for an investment over the long haul. Become a fixture in your local school decision-making, and don't give up.

A Closer Look at Our Values for Advocacy...

At [*The Expectations Project*](#) we believe that consistent involvement over time, living out these values and characteristics can and will make a difference in the lives of underserved students:

- Strategic and results oriented
- Committed to long-term change
- Centered around communities of color
- Elevating the voices of those most impacted
- Urgent yet hopeful
- Looking for common ground
- Collaborative
- Continuously learning
- Nimble and integrated
- Courageous

STEP FOUR

- Include your Church -

STEP FOUR: INCLUDE YOUR CHURCH

Working to improve your community's schools is a good way to pursue the biblical mandates to love our neighbors as ourselves, to serve the most vulnerable, and to seek the welfare of our city. Your church, like many others, may already know that, and act on that knowledge with Back to School Sundays, backpack drives, tutoring and mentoring programs, and school cleanup days. That's excellent work! You can take things a step further by working to change the system that leaves the schools in such need in the first place.

1. Build Awareness of Education Equity Issues

Use the following tools to build awareness of education equity issues in your congregation:

VIDEO: 'Ensuring Education Equity'

Possible uses: sermon illustration, Back to School Sunday announcement

Main purpose: brief overview of the topic of inequities in education

This two minute video offers a short and entertaining introduction to the idea that our current education system sets up too many of our nation's kids to fail. Its length and winsome tone makes it perfect to insert into a sermon on the theme of justice for the vulnerable. It makes it easy to explain why your congregation might concern itself with the issue of education equity. It's a great answer to the question, 'Why I'm meeting with the local superintendent,' or, 'Why I'm asking you to attend the next school board meeting.'

It could also be a valuable addition to your church's Back to School drive. Showing this video in conjunction with those activities is an easy way to open eyes to wider problems with schools and to promote the idea of going beyond service to taking up advocacy for better schools as well.

BIBLE STUDY SERIES: Biblical Principles for Better Schools

Possible uses: Sunday school curriculum, small group curriculum, mentor or tutor training

Main purpose: Present a biblical case for taking on school improvement as a cause in your church

This short Bible study series takes several scripture passages on the topic of God's care for the most vulnerable and connects the principles in those passages to the issues faced in low-resourced schools today. It could be used as an adult Sunday school or small group curriculum for people who are looking to apply biblical principles in practical service of others. If your church offers a tutoring or mentoring program, you could add one of these studies to the orientation or training for the program, to connect the volunteers' service with the bigger picture, both of biblical justice and of education inequity.

Biblical Passages and Topics Include: Mark 9: The Little Ones and Early Childhood Education; Ezekiel 34: Bad Shepherds and Childhood Trauma; John 9: A Man Born Blind and Concentrated Poverty in Schools; Jeremiah 29: Seeking the Welfare of the City and High Student Expectations.

TO ACCESS THIS FREE BIBLE STUDY SERIES: e-mail brian@expectations.org to register

STEP FOUR: INCLUDE YOUR CHURCH

1. Build Awareness of Education Equity Issues - continued

Use the following tools to build awareness of education equity issues in your congregation:

BOOK DISCUSSION: [Educating All God's Children](#) by Nicole Baker Fulgham

Where to find it: Amazon, or any Christian bookstore near you

Possible uses: Sunday school or small group curriculum

Main purpose: Provide an opportunity to look more deeply into the topic of inequity in our schools or to explore more deeply a Christian case for advocacy

For those who want to dive more deeply into the subject of the church's role in demanding a high quality education for all children, *Educating All God's Children* offers a comprehensive picture of the state of education in our country, of the biblical call for faithful people to do something about the problem, and of the long history of church-based movements making our country a better place. Suitable for a book of the month club, it's also well designed to be taken chapter by chapter for a small group or Sunday school series.

2. Mobilize for Action

As we mentioned, effective advocacy takes commitment over the long haul. However, on that long path there are sometimes key moments where a short burst of some extra energy and attention, or just plain numbers of bodies, can push forward a key change. When a moment like that comes around, rally the whole church to be involved. It can be a letter-writing campaign, mass attendance at a school board meeting, a key vote, a rally at the statehouse, or any number of other opportunities when small actions by more voices can make a big difference. You don't need to create an event like this yourself. Be in touch with local policy and advocacy groups, and join in together on something they already have happening.

3. Encourage Engagement

Maybe it's not you who should join the school board, but a member or members of your congregation. Encourage civic engagement, and even civic leadership, within your congregation. While not everyone can or should run for public office, more people than we think can and should. There is support from other non-profits available for especially women and people of color who are interested in running. If not public office, your church members can at the very least be active members of their children's schools' PTAs.

STEP FIVE

- LET US KNOW HOW IT'S GOING! -

As you use these tips to get more aware of and more involved in your area schools, we'd love to hear about what you're learning and how it's going. Contact us at brian@expectations.org to let us know what you're up to. As you get more deeply involved in improving your area schools, we're sure to have further ideas about how to make the most of the opportunities in front of you.