



Schools in Communities

Discussion Guide

Let's review

At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room. And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

The "Table-it" Rule: If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

Let's begin

- **Take five minutes** to walk through the brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief:
 - Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
 - What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share with the Group During Your Discussion

- Given 180 days per school year and a school day of 7-8 hours, children up to the age of 18 spend about [20% of their time at school](#).
- Of the [\\$730 billion](#) in total expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools during the FY2019 school year, \$57.9 billion (7.7%) came from the federal government.
- [A school district](#) is "a geographical unit for the local administration of elementary or secondary schools." [Florida](#) serves 2.7 million students in 74 districts, while [Illinois](#) serves 2 million students in 879 districts.

Let's discuss

Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** Individual communities are best equipped to understand the gaps they face and which resources can build on strengths and opportunities. How can stakeholders from parents and educators interact with policymakers and community leaders?
- **Government:** How do you think education should be funded and delivered? What do you think the role of federal, state and local governments should be?
- **Business:** How can businesses assist schools with preparation of students for today's workplace?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify opportunities for engagement in schools in your community. Consider hosting another conversation with teachers, parents, or school board members.
2. **Explore the impact of K-12 education in your community.** Look into education governance, such as school boards that set goals and visions for school districts. [Ballotpedia.org](https://www.ballotpedia.org) is a good source to look for policies of K-12 education, agencies, and school board elections.
3. **Investigate community programs.** Identify the education programs in your state by searching for [yourstate].gov + "education." Look on your state government website for state agencies, or look for an "education" drop down menu. Alternatively, see how the private sector is involved by exploring charter schools, nonprofit organizations, or mentorship programs sponsored by local businesses.
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on the role of schools in communities and their visions for how to tackle the challenges of education facing Americans at large and your community specifically. You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on the role of schools in communities in your local paper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- **Decide your next meeting topic.** Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Suggestions include:
 - [K-12 Education](#)
 - [Stitching the Fabric of Neighborhoods](#)
 - [Education Savings Accounts](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.