



Educator Self-Advocacy Toolkit

This process is adapted from a teacher ([Tyler Sisco](#)) at Washington HS in KCKPS - KNEA-KCK member.

Addressing your Board of Education

Sometimes concerns may need to be addressed at a board meeting. Most of the steps below are for public employees that are employed at a public school system. Some steps might be similar for charter and private systems.

- **Step 1: Identify how you want to contact them**
- **Step 2: Tips for Writing your Letter**
- **Step 3: Submit your letter in a timely fashion**
- **Example Letters**
- **Sample Letter You Can Use (Topic: Negotiations)**

Step 1: Identify How You Want to Contact The School Board

Here, you have 2 main options:

- Public Community Comment to all Board members and viewers
- Direct email to one or more School Board members

How to Make a Public Community Comment

Learn the rules for communicating to board members, they are governed by School Board policy.

- **Example:** You might need to submit your request to speak and declare your topic before a certain time on the day prior to the Board meeting. You might have a limit on time to speak. If you are speaking on Zoom, submit your written letter/speech. If you are speaking in person, bring copies of your letter/speech. Also, you should not discuss highly private

grievances in a Community Comment, such as disagreements with a specific colleague. Here's the language on that:

- Get acquainted with the board meeting calendar. When do they meet? How often? What time? Do they stream live?

How to Email School Board Members Directly

Learn the rules for communicating to board members, they are governed by School Board policy.

- **Examples:** For this, you just need to send an email to the right person. You can email one Board member or multiple. Targeting your message is helpful, so you should look for information about them on your school district's website, such as a "Bio". This information can help you decide who to target with your message since each Board member serves for different reasons and have a different background. For example, if your specific concern will hurt families, in particular, try to contact a school board member who is or was a parent in your district. If your concern is more focused on Education Support Professionals, see if someone like a current or former SPED para is on your school board. If nobody on your school board has a direct connection to the topic you're addressing, you can just email multiple people or the board president.

Step 2: Write Your Letter

1. Find Your Focus

- a. You might have multiple topics you want to discuss, but a good letter to the Board will **narrow its focus**. List out all the different things you want to talk about, and then narrow it down to just one or two related topics. When doing a Community Comment, you are supposed to stick to one topic only. You could have more in an email to a Board Member, but the most effective letter will be focused on a specific topic.

2. Write Everything You Want to Say About That Topic

- a. It might be helpful to just write out **everything** I want to say first. This can allow you to get out your frustrations and maybe even find new connections you didn't see before.
- b. After you do this, look for what evidence you included. Do you have personal anecdotes that provide emotional weight to your issue (*just remember to be very cognizant of student privacy*)? Do you have facts about the issue (*such as information about teacher salaries in other districts*)? If you are addressing a policy, do you have an outside resource that supports your opinion (*such as a link to a news article or website*)?

3. Organize

- a. There are a few different ways to organize your letter, but here's a suggested outline that follows a Problem-Solution organizational formula:

i. Introduce yourself briefly and your perspective

1. Are you a parent, student, staff, or community member? How long have you been affiliated with the district? If you are comfortable sharing what school you are affiliated with, you can also do that.

ii. Introduce your problem

1. What is the focus of your letter?
2. **“I am emailing you today in response to...”**
3. **“At the last School Board meeting, I noticed...”**
4. **“In my school, I have observed a problem with...”**

iii. Describe the problem

1. Provide some brief details and evidence
2. Tell a personal story. Ex. **“Even though I work just as much as coaches in other districts, I am paid less. My team has won games against schools whose coaches are paid twice what I make. How is that fair?”**
3. Provide objective facts and/or outside resources. Ex. **“[Research from 2019 in Education Policy Analysis Archives](#) found that “...states and districts should work to provide compensation packages that are competitive with those of other occupations requiring similar levels of education and that are equitable across districts, so all schools can compete in the labor market for well-prepared teachers” (page 17).**

iv. Introduce potential solutions, if any

1. You can discuss one solution you are proposing in detail, or list several possible solutions. If you have evidence to support your proposed solution, include it.
2. If you don't have a concrete solution, then ask them to come up with one. Ex. **“As a School Board member, it is your job to find solutions to these kinds of issues.”**

v. Conclude politely

1. Our School Board members are not paid for their work. For example, in the state of Kansas, it is against the law for School Board members

to be paid a salary. They are elected volunteers. It is important to acknowledge their work, even if you are frustrated with their decisions.

2. **“Thank you for taking the time to listen to my concerns. I appreciate your willingness to serve on our KCKPS School Board and trust that you will make the best decision for our students, staff and community.”**

4. **Revise and Edit**

- a. A good letter will be brief. Community Comments are limited to a 3-minute speech (which is about 450 words, depending on how fast you speak). And we all know how much we hate to read a long email, so if you email the Board directly you might want to make it even shorter than 450 words. You might have to cut out things you liked. Just remember to narrow your focus. If you can't narrow it anymore, try to see if you can cut out some evidence/details that are redundant.
- b. Make sure to use Spelling and Grammar Check on whatever tool you are using! You could also ask a friend to read it with you. They might notice any mistakes you missed.

Step 3: Submit Your Letter in a Timely Fashion

- Remember that if you are doing a Community Comment, you **must** follow the board policy timeline for submitting your request to speak.
- If you are contacting a Board member via email, I've found it is **best practice to email them at least 3 days before the next Board meeting**. This gives them time to read your message, respond with any questions, and think about what you said before the next meeting.

Sample emails from KCKPS teachers to board

Email to School Board Members by Eddie Gunter, July 20, 2021

(Shared here with his permission)

I just wanted to express my sincere disappointment in the board's YES voters on the motion to increase administrative salaries by over 12% tonight and want to commend the no voters who recognized the lack of any consideration at all given to the certified staff line item and the lack of willingness to consider a phase in the 5-year plan of study of salaries. Having watched every board budget workshop and certified negotiations, I can state that I have not heard one time anyone from the district's negotiation team has not come anywhere close to a 12% wage increase for certified staff.

Having proudly served this district, and only this district for 22 years, I cannot sit idle and not point out the lack of equality among ALL employees in this district. While I commend the increase for classified staff, it falls grossly short of what is being allocated to our administrative teams. If one group gets and deserves 12%+ raise, then all groups get and deserve a 12% raise,

I do not believe that anyone's job in educating KCKPS children is any more or less important, from custodial and secretarial, bus and nutrition workers, teachers, paras, SPED, leadership and central office. In fact, I believe that every person at every level has a responsibility to educate, care and ensure success for all of our students. Tonight, I believe your YES vote expresses the opposite of that statement. I would like you to ask district leadership to come to the next negotiation with numbers for a 50%, 75%, and 100% catch up for certified so that you would have that data to choose from just as you did for administrators tonight.

I encourage my students by teaching them the importance of these principles when not calling an injustice like this one tonight. I teach my students to be involved in local government, watch our school board meetings, and hold all our community and school leaders accountable. Just sharing my opinion as someone who loves KCKPS and has NEVER left the district or even looked elsewhere. Thank you for your service and taking time to read this commentary.

Thank you.

Sample Letter for Contract Negotiations

You can use parts of this letter to help you write your own! Feel free to take some of it and add your personal touch. This is a little long for a Community Comment unless you speak quickly.

Hello, KCKPS Board of Education

I am contacting you about the ongoing 2021-2022 Certified Employee Contract Negotiations. As a [insert your role], I have concerns about how the district is treating its employees.

At a Negotiations meeting a few months ago, the KNEA Negotiations team presented highly detailed data comparing our salary schedule to that of surrounding districts. These districts are ones that our teachers often come from, or leave to go work in. This data showed that our salaries are not competitive with the majority of the surrounding districts, especially at the Master's degree or higher levels, and for teachers with more years of experience.

This is contributing to high staff turnover in our district. [Add a personal detail about this topic].

There is research to back up the connection between teacher turnover and compensation. In [this 2019 study published in the Education Policy Analysis Archives](#), the researchers found that “While most working conditions variables in our model did not have statistically significant relationships with turnover, compensation and administrative support did have significant relationships. We found that... the highest possible district salary was related to teacher turnover” (pg 14). Teacher pay was one of the most important factors related to turnover, according to this study, and that relationship was most significant for highly experienced educators on the higher end of the pay scale. Essentially, we are losing experienced teachers because of our salary schedule. Other working conditions were less important for turnover in this study.

I think this proves the idea that if someone is compensated well, they are more likely to stay and work to make a system better. But if someone is compensated poorly and works in a difficult system, they are more likely to just leave and look for better opportunities. Many other problems our district faces would be lessened by fixing our high teacher turnover rates. More consistency in our staffing will help improve the quality of instruction for students, foster positive culture and leadership from within, and help Central Office departments like Human Resources. How

wonderful would it be to have more highly qualified candidates than we have room for? In order to make this a district a place where people want to work, we have to invest in our staff at all levels.

I implore the Board to consider this and vote to accept the Negotiation team's proposed salary schedule from the July 26 meeting. This would be a major step toward making our compensation competitive with the surrounding job market. I also would like to see the Board make a long-term plan that ensures we do not fall behind neighboring districts like we currently are.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your willingness to serve on our KCKPS School Board and trust that you will make the best decision for our students, staff and community.

[Your Name and Information]

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Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019). The trouble with teacher turnover: How teacher attrition affects students and schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 27, 36. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3699>