

How Can I Approach My School Board?

If you are uncomfortable with the security measures in your district, there are several things you can do.

There is no one perfect way to make a change, but there are a few tips to help you get started.

1. Start Small

Starting with the building your child attends makes sense. This could be part of your information-gathering process, or you may find some support at the school level from your child's teacher, SRO or principal. It will also help you better understand how things are currently handled.

2. Be Prepared

It is important that you take the time to fully understand the issue as much as possible. You will want to know exactly what current processes look like and be able to compare and contrast those with what you want to happen. Look to case studies of districts that you feel are doing things well and be prepared to cite these studies and give specific information.

3. Gather Support

While parents can attend school board meetings individually and even speak during open meetings, concerns are more likely to be taken seriously if there is evidence that there is significant concern. Talk to other parents in your school and district, create a group on social media or otherwise, and raise awareness and involvement in order to demonstrate that the issue is something that is important to a significant group. Attend meetings as a group if possible.

4. Have a Clear Plan

Approaching the board to say something like, "Our schools are not safe enough and could not counter an active shooter attack" is only the beginning. This points out a flaw, but you will have far better chances of effecting a change if this is accompanied by a reasonable, clear suggestion. Instead, a statement like, "Our schools need to be better prepared in the event of an active shooter attack. We can do this by providing proper training to our staff and planning future capital improvement projects with security features in the budget" is focused on the solution, so it is more likely to gain traction.

5. Do Your Research

If possible, learn about the board members in advance. Choose one or more that tend to agree with your position. Consider meeting with these members individually ahead of speaking at a meeting to get tips and advice, or to see if they are willing to support your efforts.

6. Use the Right Approach

Take the time to attend a few school board meetings before you plan to speak. This will give you a chance to see how they typically run and prepare yourself. When you do speak to the board, be sure to be positive, prepared and measured. Especially with emotional content, the approach you take can make a big difference. This includes your verbal communications, body language and general tone. Avoid bad language, raising your voice or other behaviors that could seem aggressive.

7. Vote

Remember that school board members are elected officials. They typically serve for terms of four years at a time, and they are voted into office. If you feel the current board does not reflect the needs and demographic of the community, be sure to vote for people that you feel are more representative of the community next term.

8. Be Persistent

Remember that you are requesting a big change, and it may not happen the first time you ask. It may take attending meetings over a span of time, or even changing your approach if your first attempt fails. If your first attempt is not successful, that does not mean that you will never be able to make a change.

