



Hindu American Foundation
hinduamerican.org



Education Advocacy Toolkit



Introduction

Why Trust HAF for Education Policy Advocacy?

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) has been at the forefront of religious education policy for over two decades, engaging in a range of activities, from advocating to state governments about statewide educational standards to training middle and high school social studies teachers to better represent the ancient and complex history of Hindu Dharmas. To view more of HAF's education resources, [please click here](#).

Why are Hindus involved in Education Policy advocacy?

Many assume that U.S. schools operate with objectivity and superior standards. However, textbooks are not neutral; political agendas have shaped them and, at times, reflect state-sponsored religious or ideological intentions. This has led to the misrepresentation of communities like ours, and illustrates how vigilance isn't optional; it's essential.

In the United States, government policies recognize and protect the role of parents in the education ecosystem, granting them the right to ensure that schools adhere to the academic standards and values they claim to uphold. Unlike in many former British colonies, where education systems are often more centralized and less transparent, the U.S. model encourages active parental engagement through school boards, curriculum reviews, and public comment opportunities. However, Hindu communities have historically been underrepresented in these processes, largely due to unfamiliarity with how the system functions and how to participate effectively.

[Many Hindu American students](#) remember the terrifying ordeal of having to participate in their class discussion surrounding Hinduism. Depictions usually center around polytheism, idol worship, caste, cows, and similarly skewed descriptions of karma and dharma. Other Hindu American students felt complete erasure, where no discussion of Hindu Dharmas was ever in the classroom.

Neither is ideal, and both can seriously harm a Hindu student's emotional, social, and spiritual development. The Hindu American Foundation has worked to provide parents, teachers, and students with the tools to teach about Hindus respectfully and accurately in their schools' classrooms. Especially as national controversies center around our classrooms, as Hindu Americans, we must stay involved in public education.

This guide provides concerned parents with the information they need to meet with district officials, convey their concerns, and work towards resolving pertinent education advocacy issues.



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Instructions

Advocacy is a powerful way to create change and make voices heard. This toolkit is designed to help you understand the basics of advocacy, develop effective strategies, and take action on the issues you care about. Inside, you'll find practical guidance, tips, and resources for engaging with decision-makers, building coalitions, and mobilizing your community.

Whether you're new to advocacy or looking to sharpen your skills, this toolkit will provide you with the tools and confidence you need to make a meaningful impact. The toolkit is designed for you to be able to take action on a range of education advocacy issues by utilizing the editable yellow highlighted spaces throughout the document to fit your individual needs.

School Board FAQs

What is a school board?

A school board is a governing body elected (or occasionally appointed) to oversee the public school district in a community. It sets policies, approves budgets, hires and evaluates the superintendent, and ensures schools are run effectively and per state and federal laws.

What are the main responsibilities of a school board?

School boards have a wide variety of responsibilities. They set and approve district policies and goals, and are responsible for appointing and sometimes firing the superintendent. They also control budget and expenditures, curriculum and instructional materials, and assist in overseeing most aspects of the school. Finally, they are also responsible for engaging with the community and responding to stakeholder concerns. District residents will almost always have the right to contact their school board members about topics of concern through public comments, meetings, emails, or phone calls.

How are school board members selected? How long is a school board member's term?

Most school board members are elected by voters in their local district during municipal or general elections. In some cases, especially in large cities, members may be appointed by a mayor or another local authority. Terms typically range from 2 to 6 years, depending on state laws and local regulations. Some districts have staggered terms to maintain continuity, meaning there is an election every year.

What qualifications are required to serve on a school board?

Generally, candidates must be residents of the district and registered voters. They may also have to meet local or state-specific requirements. A background in education is not required, but an understanding of public policy, budgeting, and community engagement is helpful.

How do school boards make decisions?

Decisions are typically made through majority vote during public meetings. Agendas are published in advance, and many districts allow public comment before votes. Oftentimes, while decisions appear to be made at public hearings, they are actually made days or even weeks ahead of time. This emphasizes the importance of building relationships with legislators and staying engaged throughout the year.

Can the public attend school board meetings?

Yes. School board meetings are usually open to the public, and many districts provide time for public comment. Executive (closed) sessions may be held for confidential matters such as personnel issues or legal concerns.



Key School Board Contact Information

Contact Name	Position	Office Location	Phone Number	Email
Name	Role	Address	(000) 000-0000	Email
Name	Role	Address	(000) 000-0000	Email
Name	Role	Address	(000) 000-0000	Email
Name	Role	Address	(000) 000-0000	Email

First Time Advocate Guide

Start by Learning

Understand the issues

- Read up on local, state, and federal education policies, budgets, and challenges. You can be an advocate even if you don't have children, or your children are no longer attending school. Ask students what their perspectives are; they'll be most affected by the curriculum!

Follow education organizations

- Subscribe to newsletters or follow groups that work on issues that matter to you.

Know your local landscape.

- Learn who your school board members, superintendent, and state education officials are.

Volunteer at school events

- Build relationships with teachers and help support your community

Use Your Voice

Main Talking Points for Advocacy

- Begin with articulating what bothers you about your child's experience in the classroom. Use the talking points below to brainstorm and then articulate your thoughts clearly.

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____



Don't be afraid to take action

- It can seem daunting, but grassroots advocacy is the most effective way to make a difference; don't be afraid to be the first person to speak out.
 - Online resources like [these, created by HAF](#), can be a great place to start planning.

Attend school board meetings

- These are usually public and a great way to learn—and later, to speak

Submit public comments

- Many education agencies and boards accept written feedback on decisions

Call or email your representatives

- Share your concerns about education issues with elected officials at every level; make sure that you are contacting them about an issue that they can act on

Raise Awareness

Talk to others and use social media

- Share news, calls to action, or your advocacy journey online, bring up education topics in community spaces, workplaces, or religious settings.

Write an op-ed or letter to the editor

- Use local media to spotlight key education issues

Join or start a parent or community group

- Even if you don't have kids in school, find networks working on education equity. Show the students in your community that you care!

Volunteer with education-focused organizations

- Help with events, canvassing, or mentorship



Stay Active

Track legislation and policy changes

Vote in school board and local elections

- These races often have the most immediate impact on education

Follow up and stay in touch

- Advocacy is often about persistence, so don't be afraid to follow up with officials or allies.

Guide to Delivering Public Comments

Before the meeting

Review Public Comment Rules

- Each school board has specific guidelines for public participation, including time limits and topics allowed.
- Pay attention to time limits; most districts allow 2-5 minutes per speaker.
- **Pre-register or Sign Up On-Site**
 - See if you can participate virtually or in person only.
 - Some districts require advance sign-ups via email or an online form, so make sure to check your district policy.
 - Some meetings will also have a public comment waiting list, so arrive early to make sure your voice is heard.
 - You do not need to have children, be a citizen, or be a green card holder to deliver public comments or email the board of trustees members.
 - Many districts retain a residency requirement for public comment, so you may be required to have an address within the district.
 - Feel free to adjust our script and testimony below to reflect you!
- **Strength in Numbers**
 - Reach out to other community members to register for comments to show how important your issue is.
 - Coordinate your strategy with them to strategize your talking points and speaking order.
 - Make sure you only repeat the most important points.
- **Prepare and Rehearse**
 - Make sure that you write and practice your testimony, ensuring that it remains within any time limits and presents a complete argument against the curriculum.
- **Make Connections**
 - Use personal stories to emphasize the effect of [redacted] (issue) on your student and life.
- **Consider Your Scope**
 - Keep your argument focused and specific; your statement could be one of the first times a person has ever heard from a Hindu.
 - Ensure that you provide sufficient information for an uninformed person to understand your opinion, without overwhelming your audience.
- **Check the Agenda**
 - Review the meeting agenda to prepare for the public comment section and plan your testimony. Agendas are typically posted 1-7 days before the meeting.

During the meeting

Be Respectful

- Address the board professionally and stay calm.
- Do not use obscene gestures, profanity, or name-calling towards decision makers, opponents, or other attendees, no matter how frustrated you feel.
- Don't get provoked or become confrontational with anyone who opposes your position; disagree respectfully without raising your voice. Speak in calm, measured tones.
- Stay within the allotted time or less, even if you don't get to finish all your points; nothing frustrates decision-makers more than not complying with time limits. Instead, conclude with "I'm happy to answer any additional questions you may have."

After the meeting

Follow Up Within 24 Hours

- Email a full typed version of your statement to all the board members and the superintendent after your meeting.
- If there was a decision made during the meeting that you disagree with, follow up and explain why you disagree.
- You can also include additional resources to strengthen your argument or detail your opposition. Check the [HAF Education Resources webpage here](#) for more materials!

Stay Engaged

- Pay attention to any statements made by the school district to see if they update their policies or make any curriculum changes.

Remember, staying involved is just as important as speaking at a meeting! Even if you don't have any children in school, your voice still matters!

Staying Involved

- **Support your schools**
 - Volunteer with local schools or after-school programs to mentor young community members.
- **Attend school board meetings** and stay informed on education policy issues.
 - Be informed about the latest news for the issues that matter most to the community.
- **Community Coordination**
 - Help advocate for equitable school funding and resources in your community in coalitions or advocacy groups.
- **Engage with former students, teachers, and administrators** to understand their needs.
 - Learn from people who have experience with the education system from the inside.
- **Use your platform to raise awareness** about education challenges and solutions.
 - Even if you do not have children, you can still advocate for the friends and family that do.



Constituent Email Outreach Template

Initial outreach email

Subject: Meeting Request Regarding _____ (Support/Opposition) for _____

Email Body:

Dear _____ (school district name) _____ (Board member/Superintendent),

I am reaching out today regarding _____ (the issue that you are contacting them about). As a parent of _____ (a student/students), a student at _____ (school name/s), I strongly feel that _____ (your thoughts on the issue; elaborate your thoughts as much as possible, and use evidence, examples, and experiences from your life).

For these reasons, I urge you to _____ (state your desired outcome).

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these concerns with the Board in a formal meeting. Please let me know if this would be possible so we can schedule a time to speak.

Sincerely,

_____ (first and last name)

_____ (full address)

_____ (children(s) schools)



Follow-up email for after meeting

Subject: Meeting Request Regarding _____ (Support/Opposition) for _____

Email Body:

Dear _____ (school district name) _____ (Board member/Superintendent),

I am reaching out today to follow up after our meeting regarding _____ (the issue that you spoke to them about). As a parent of _____ (a student/students), a student at _____ (school name/s), I strongly feel that _____ (your thoughts on the issue; elaborate your thoughts as much as possible, and use evidence, examples, and experiences from your life).

For these reasons, I urge you to _____ (state your desired outcome).

Sincerely,

_____ (first and last name)

_____ (full address)

_____ (children(s) schools, if applicable)



Sample Public Testimony Script

Members of the Board of Trustees,

My name is _____ (Name). I am a _____ (District) parent with _____ (child/children) at _____ (School name(s)).

As the Board is _____ (mention the topic of the public comment period/agenda item; make sure your statement stays on topic, or comes during an open comment session), I wish to tell you about the **Hindu community's** _____ (stance on topic; describe why it matters to you and the Hindu community).

_____ (Elaborate on your stance; provide evidence for your stance and explain why the district should listen to you; make sure that your thoughts are clear, and there is a plan for solving the problem)

- This is the problem:
- This is what we are seeing:
- This is the solution:

_____ (Summarize your thoughts and experiences. Make sure that you remain respectful, even if you are disagreeing with or criticizing their stances or actions)

For these reasons, _____ (reiterate your desired outcome)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Calendar

General calendar template (ie, track board meetings, registration deadlines, etc.)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Advocacy works, as seen by HAF's past wins, ranging from [textbook reform](#) to creating curriculum resources. Staying informed, engaged, and proactive is key to making a meaningful impact in education. Whether you're a parent, student, or community member, your voice matters—and this toolkit is just the beginning. Use it as a foundation to navigate the education system, advocate effectively, and help shape a more inclusive, accurate, and accountable learning environment for all.