

INVITE YOUR LEGISLATORS -

Back to School!

From **October 1-November 11** the United States Congress will be on recess. This means your elected officials will be in their home states and districts. They will be using this time to meet with constituents to learn about your priorities and interests. Magnet Schools of America encourages you to invite them to tour your magnet school during this recess period.

Members of Congress will be looking for opportunities to make public appearances and observe innovative education programs like yours up close. Their schedules fill up quickly, so please reach out to them as soon as possible. We have created this guide that includes tips for hosting a successful school tour, a sample invitation letter that you may use for the scheduling process, talking points and background materials.

Now is a crucial time to be engaged and proactive! Over the summer, the U.S. House of Representatives introduced legislation that would eliminate all federal funding for magnet schools that is provided through the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, while supporting charter schools.

We need your help to educate our nation's political leaders about the most successful form of public school choice.

Please plan to open your school doors and showcase how your unique magnet program is preparing students for the future!



U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar from Minnesota visits Salk Middle School to learn about its STEM program.

Keys to hosting a magnet school tour

Inviting your elected officials to visit your magnet school is a powerful way to inform them about the theme-based programs that are offered in their district, and to show them how important federal, state, and local support is for these programs. It is also an effective way to build relationships with these officials and their staff, as well as establish yourself as a valuable expert and resource.



✓ STEP ONE: Invite your legislators to visit your magnet school.

1. Contact your legislators' Washington, DC offices to schedule a visit. The contact information for your two U.S. senators and congressional representative may be found in our Grassroots Action Center at: <http://www.congressweb.com/msa/legislators>
2. Call well in advance for scheduling purposes. Depending on their calendars this could be a month ahead of time. Most congressional offices also require a written invitation before they will consider a scheduling request. You may use the sample invitation letter that is included for this purpose.
3. When you call, ask to speak with the office scheduler and clearly state that you would like the legislator to visit your school. You should also invite staff members to attend as well.
Sample Conversation: Hi, my name is [your name] and I'd like to invite Senator/Representative [Last Name] to visit [name of magnet school] during the congressional recess. How can I send a formal invitation to the office and who should I follow-up with afterwards?
4. Follow-up with the scheduler as necessary and be persistent. It is wise to be flexible and have alternate dates in mind. In addition, you may want to ask for the scheduler's contact information so that you may follow-up with them directly about a week after your initial contact.

✓ STEP TWO: Plan your legislator's visit for maximum effect. Make the visit worth their time.

1. **Plan a special event** that will bring constituents to your school during your legislator's visit. Attendees can include school personnel, parents, students, school board members, institutional and business affiliates, and community leaders.
2. **Make the visit educational** - Showcase the programs that are offered by your magnet school. Prepare folders that include marketing materials and information about your magnet program, the number of children it serves, your school demographics, details of community partnerships, and data about student performance. You should provide copies of these folders to your legislator and all attendees.
3. **Contact the local media** to cover the tour/event to ensure the community learns about your school as well as your legislator's interest. Let the congressional office also know that you will be working on media coverage and a press release.



STEP THREE: Prepare a plan and agenda for the school tour.

1. Identify who you would like to participate in the event. This could include the school principal, magnet coordinator, lead teachers, parents, students, or school partners.
2. Invite all these people and schedule a brief meeting to review their roles and the details of the tour.
3. Assign a staff person to take photos and notes during the visit. Be sure to share the photos with the congressional member and coordinate with their office to conduct press outreach.
4. Before they visit, learn about the elected official and their interests, policy views, and committee assignments by visiting their website and social media outlets.

Sample School Tour Agenda -

- Once everyone has arrived for the school tour, each participant should introduce themselves to the member of Congress and explain how they are associated with the magnet school.
- Make sure there is a presentation by the principal welcoming the elected official to the school.
- Mention how government support has helped the magnet school, especially if your school or district has received a Magnet Schools Assistance Program grant recently or in the past.
- Lead the legislator on a tour of your facility highlighting the most impressive features of the school.
- Share general information about the magnet program that addresses: student enrollment and demographics, the school theme and curricula, school transportation and admissions process, community partnerships, teacher professional development, parent and family involvement.
- Have one or two students join the tour and talk about their experience. They can discuss what they enjoy most about the magnet theme and their future goals. You may also consider having them participate in a program demonstration.
- Consider having a teacher present and reinforce how the magnet program has helped students academically and have them share a memorable story about a favorite student.
- Allow time for the elected official to ask questions from the tour host, students, or any other participants. You should also prepare a few questions to ask them about their education interests.
- Before the tour concludes, please make sure to inform them about the proposal to cut magnet school funding in Congress and ask for their support when they return to Washington, DC.



STEP FOUR: Reinforce the event with your legislator.

1. Publicize the visit in your school newsletter or other appropriate publications. Send copies to both the legislator's local and Washington, DC offices. Don't forget to also post to social media including Facebook and Twitter.
2. Follow-up with the congressional office with any requested materials and offer to be a future resource on issues relating to education and magnet schools.
3. Send a thank you letter to your legislator, their staff, and anyone who helped arrange the visit.
4. Finally, let us know how the school tour went by filling out this [feedback form](http://bit.ly/1IkKOBi) located at - <http://bit.ly/1IkKOBi>

If you have any questions about this process or need advice, please email our Legislative and Communications Manager at john.laughner@magnet.edu

SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER

<<Insert District or School Logo>>

<<Insert Date>>

The Honorable <<Insert First and Last Name>>

<<Insert Washington, DC Office Address>>

Dear Senator or Representative <<Enter last name>>,

On behalf of <<Insert name of magnet school>> I am writing to invite you and your staff to visit our school on <<Enter date>> at <<Enter time>>.

We would be honored to welcome you to our school during the congressional recess and provide you with an opportunity to learn about the specialized curricula and instruction that is offered at our magnet school. During your visit you will be able to meet with our faculty and staff and witness up close how our <<Describe theme>> is challenging students and preparing them for success in the 21st century.

(Feel free to personalize this section by describing a new program that you are excited about, or a new partnership you have formed, or new building/facility that you have opened. For example, you could describe how your magnet school just started a new STEM or Performing Arts program that features a partnership with a local university or business. This will draw the attention of members of Congress who are interested in learning about new and dynamic education programs)

As I am sure you are aware, there are approximately 3,800 magnet schools in the United States making them the largest form of public school choice. Based on innovative and theme-based curricula, magnet schools breakdown traditional school attendance boundaries by allowing families to choose programs that appeal most to their children's academic interests and talents.

We look forward to hosting you during the congressional recess. Please feel free to contact me directly at <<Enter email address>> or <<Enter phone number>> with any questions you may have about our school and to schedule a time for your visit.

Sincerely,

<<Enter Name>>

<<Enter Title>>



Magnet schools

are the **original** and largest form of public school choice, dating back more than 40 years.

There are now more than 3,800 magnet schools across the U.S. serving over 2.6 million students.

Magnet schools make up one quarter of the top 100 high schools.

(U.S. News & World Report)

What are the benefits of magnet schools?

Magnet Schools serve a wide array of students from all backgrounds. They provide rigorous education and promote higher level cognitive and social learning that helps students transition to postsecondary education and careers.

While the achievement gap continues to widen nationwide, many communities across the country have used magnet schools to close that gap, reduce racial tensions, and make a lasting, positive impact on children, their families, their communities, and our national economy.

Turnaround low-performing schools.

Magnet schools revitalize low-performing schools through specialized curriculum, high-quality instruction, and family and community partnerships that include mentoring, internships, financial support, and field trips. Magnet school students are less likely to be absent or skip class—and provide more peer support for academic achievement.

Preparing students for the future.

Magnet school curricula provide all students with the skills to be career and college ready. Often, magnet school requirements exceed those of their district and state. Students take more credits and more rigorous courses that align with college admissions requirements.

Innovative, high-quality curricula and diverse teaching styles.

Magnet school teachers and administrators are well-trained to meet the unique needs of students and nurture their talents. This makes students more interested in school and more excited to learn.

School choice in the public school system.

Parents should have the option to send their kids to a school that focuses on their strengths, engages them, and motivates them to learn.

Diversity.

Research shows students learn better and are more prepared for the real world when they work alongside other students with different backgrounds.



Did you know?

Magnet schools are:

Free public elementary, middle, and high schools that are operated by school districts

Open and accessible to all students, regardless of where they live—most use a lottery system for admission to accommodate the significant demand

Innovative, offering theme-based curricula in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Fine and Performing Arts, International Baccalaureate, International Studies, Career and Technical Education (CTE), World Languages (immersion and non-immersion), and many others

Accountable to state and district supervision, and to state academic standards

Why do we need magnet schools?

Our nation's educational system remains largely segregated by both race and class. It needs to be improved so all students from a wide array of socio-economic backgrounds have access to diverse and academically rigorous learning environments. We need all students to be well-prepared for college and career opportunities.

- High school teachers estimate that one-third of graduating high school seniors are not college ready and will need remedial course work.
- 63 percent of all jobs in the United States will require some postsecondary education.
- 90 percent of all new jobs in growing industries like STEM with high wages will require some postsecondary education.

Low-income and minority children are being left behind. More than 16 million children in the U.S.—22 percent of all children—live in poverty. These students, many of whom are also members of racial minority groups, disproportionately attend the lowest-achieving, segregated schools.

- By the end of 4th grade, low-income, African-American and Hispanic students are, on average, two years behind their peers in reading. By the time they reach the 12th grade, they are four years behind.
- A majority of African-American and Latino students now attend schools that are predominantly low-income and non-white, leading to what researchers define as “double segregation.”
- Even more disheartening is evidence that suggests that schools that once had successful integration programs, especially in the South, are becoming segregated yet again.

The bottom line

Magnet schools have taught us how to reduce the achievement gaps among students from different backgrounds and give all of them a real chance to thrive. We must invest in providing all students—regardless of background and zip codes—with access to a first-rate education that lays the foundation for a successful future.

How are magnet schools different than charter schools?

| | Magnet Schools | Charter Schools |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| Part of the public school system? | Yes | Yes |
| Who operates and provides oversight? | Same district administration and school board as public schools | Varies: authorizers may include state or local school board, local university and/or private entity |
| Adherence to state requirements | Must adhere to state requirements | Laws often exempt charter schools |
| Can they be for-profit? | No | Yes |
| Cost | Free | Free |

Learn more at www.magnet.edu

