



## Step-by-Step Guide

Keys to Hosting a Successful  
Magnet School Tour



# 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 an expert and valuable 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 at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)
2. Your elected officials calendars fill-up quickly, so call as soon as possible for scheduling purposes. Most congressional offices also require a written invitation before they will consider a scheduling request. To get started, you may use the sample invitation letter that is included with this guide.
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]. 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. If you have the time and resources, 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. If you would like us to review your materials or to offer MSA staff as spokespeople for a national angle, please email: [communications@magnet.edu](mailto:communications@magnet.edu)

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

1. Identify who you would like to have participate in the event. This can 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 beforehand.
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 and share on social media. Be sure to get the member's social media handles so you can thank them after the visit and tag their account.
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 information and stories that give context to your magnet program's highlights such as: student enrollment and demographics, the school theme and curricula, school transportation, admissions process, community partnerships, teacher professional development and 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 how it relates to their future goals. You may also consider having them participate in a program demonstration.
- Consider having a teacher present to 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 of the tour host, students, or any other participants. You should also prepare a few questions to ask them about their education interests.

## ✓ **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, D.C. offices. Don't forget to post on 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 questions or need advice, email our Legislative and Communications Manager at [john.laughner@magnet.edu](mailto: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 and provide you with an opportunity to learn about the innovative curriculum and educational experiences students receive at our magnet school. During your visit you will be able to meet with our faculty and staff and witness first-hand how our <<Describe theme>> is challenging students and preparing them for college and career success.

*[Personalize this section and tap into what you know the member of Congress cares about. Describe a new program that you are excited about, 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. ]*

Magnet schools are a popular form of public school choice. There are approximately 4,340 magnet schools in the United States serving nearly 3.5 million students. Those numbers will continue to grow as more schools are transitioning to the magnet school model. 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. In fact, approximately 70 percent of magnet schools have waitlists full of parents eager to get their students into these high-performing schools.

We look forward to hosting you during your next visit to the district. 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>>

## KEY FACTS ABOUT MAGNET SCHOOLS

- Based on a report commissioned by Magnet Schools of America and conducted by the University of North Carolina-Charlotte's Urban Institute, there are approximately 4,340 public elementary and secondary magnet schools serving nearly 3.5 million students in the United States.
- Magnet schools are the largest form of public school choice. They were originally created in the 1970's as a means of voluntarily promoting school integration and improving the quality of America's educational system through innovative curricula and classroom instruction.
- Magnet schools utilize a variety of academic themes to attract students of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds including: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), language immersion, business and communications, careers and technology, and visual and performing arts. Others use specialized instructional techniques like those found in Montessori schools or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs.
- Magnet schools break down traditional school attendance boundaries by allowing families to choose programs that appeal most to their children's academic talents and interests.
- The first magnet schools were modeled after the Bronx School of Science, the Boston Latin School, Chicago's Lane Tech, and San Francisco's Lowell High School. These schools offered specialized or advanced curricula to select students.
- Skyline High School in Dallas, Texas is considered the first magnet school in the United States. It opened its doors on March 1, 1971.
- The term magnet school was first used in describing the effect of a Houston Performing and Visual Arts School, when an educator said it worked like a "magnet" in attracting students.
- A majority of magnet schools do not have entrance criteria, but rather, use computer-based lottery systems for admissions, so that students of all backgrounds are welcome.
- Since students' only eligibility requirement is an interest in the theme, students from a wide array of backgrounds attend magnet schools resulting in higher level cognitive and social learning.
- Magnet schools serve all students including English language learners as well as students receiving special education services. Transportation to magnet schools is typically provided at no cost to families.
- Magnet schools are more "hands on – minds on" and often use an approach to learning that is inquiry or project-based. They use the state, district, or Common Core standards in all subject areas, however, they are taught within the overall theme of the school.
- Magnet schools are administered by public school districts. They are subject to the same measures of accountability and standards as traditional public schools, as well as the collective bargaining agreements made with teachers unions.

# TALKING POINTS

**Academic Excellence** - Numerous studies have shown that students at magnet schools perform better than their peers at traditional schools.

- One of the few large-scale national studies of magnet schools found that magnet schools were more effective than traditional public schools, Catholic schools, and secular private schools at raising student achievement in reading and social studies.
- According to the latest *U.S. News and World Report: High School Rankings*, magnet schools make up 25 percent of the top 100 high schools. This speaks volumes considering they represent less than five percent of all public schools.
- In 2017, for the third year in a row, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) announced that magnet school students significantly outperformed their peers across the state, district, and in charter schools in Math and English/Language Arts assessments.



**REMEMBER: YOU ARE THE MAGNET SCHOOL EXPERT IN YOUR COMMUNITY. WHAT REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES CAN YOU SHARE TO BRING THESE TALKING POINTS TO LIFE?**

- Many studies have found that students attending magnet schools have higher graduation rates than students attending traditional public schools.
- According to a 2011 study, magnet students are less likely to be absent or skip class than at non-magnet schools.
- A UCLA study found that magnet school faculties are more stable than non-magnet school faculties, in addition to being more racially diverse.

**Public School Choice** - No child learns the same; parents should have the option to send their child to a school that focuses on their strengths, engages them, and motivates them to learn.

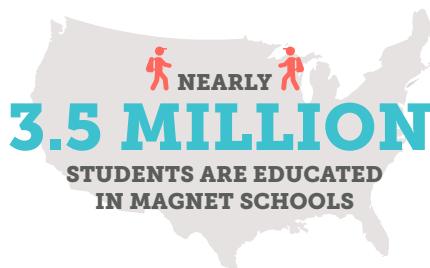
- A large majority of magnet schools have waitlists full of parents eager to get their students into these high-performing schools. According to a recent Magnet Schools of America national survey, 70 percent of magnet schools report having a waiting list.
- A 2001 study found that magnet schools report higher levels of parent and community involvement than traditional public schools.

**School Diversity** - Research shows students learn better and are more prepared for the real world when they are exposed to students with different backgrounds.

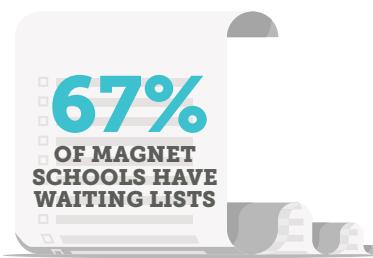
- According to a 2009 study, magnet students report a greater sense of community at school and perceive more peer support for academic achievement. The study also found that these students also report more positive intergroup relations and less racial tension among peers.

# FAST FACTS

## About Magnet Schools



A recent study revealed that **1 OUT OF EVERY 15 PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS** in the U.S. attends a magnet school – that's **nearly 3.5 million students** across the country receiving a high-quality, theme-based education.



Magnet schools are a popular school choice option. **MANY MAGNET SCHOOLS HAVE WAITING LISTS** full of parents eager to get their students into these high-performing schools.<sup>1</sup>

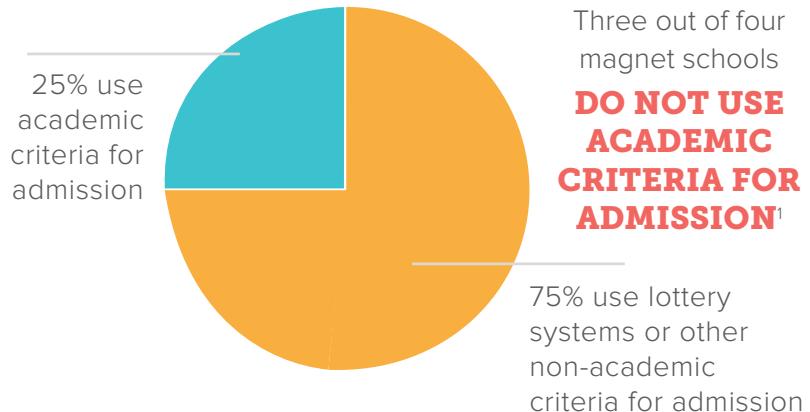


**THERE ARE NOW 4,340 MAGNET SCHOOLS.**

With continued funding, more parents will have the opportunity to choose the public magnet school that best suits their child's learning needs.

### COMMON MAGNET THEMES<sup>2</sup>

- STEM Related 30%
- Visual, Performing Arts 16%
- International Baccalaureate (IB) 12%
- Gifted and Talented 8%
- Foreign/World Languages 7%



- A large percentage of magnets report graduation rates of 90 percent or higher**, with at least 72 percent of students enrolling in post-secondary education.<sup>1</sup>
- Low-performing schools can be revitalized** by magnet programs through specialized curriculum, high-quality instruction, and family and community partnerships that include mentoring, internships, financial support, and real-world learning experiences.<sup>3</sup>
- Fifty-eight percent of magnets surveyed report lower teacher turnover rates than at the district level.<sup>1</sup>
- Sixty percent of magnet schools report state math test scores that were higher than those at the district level.**<sup>4</sup>
- Magnets enroll a larger share of black and Hispanic students than traditional public schools and a higher proportion of low-income students**, ensuring that all students have access to rigorous high-quality academic options.<sup>5</sup>

1 Magnet Schools of America. (2017). National survey examining magnet schools. Washington, DC

2 Gavarkovich, D., Hawn Nelson, A., Marcus, A., & Alvarado, L. (2016). Magnet school identification by state. Charlotte, NC: UNC Charlotte Urban Institute. On behalf of Magnet Schools of America

3 Kahlenberg, R. D. (2009). Turnaround schools that work: Moving beyond separate but equal. Washington, DC: The Century Foundation. Orfield, M. (2013). Integrated magnet schools: Outcomes and best practices. Minneapolis, MN: Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity.

4 Polikoff, M., & Hardaway, T. (2017). Don't forget about magnet schools when thinking about school choice. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

5 Siegel-Hawley, G., & Frankenberg, E. (2011). Magnet school student outcomes: What the research says. Washington, DC: The National Coalition on School Diversity. Cobb, C., Bifulco, R., & Bell, C. (2009). Evaluation of Connecticut's interdistrict magnet schools. Storrs, CT: The Center for Education Policy Analysis, University of Connecticut.