



Engaging Opponents of School Choice Tip Sheet

We might not always agree, and we won't always engage, but we welcome and respect everyone's opinions. Listening makes us better advocates, whether it helps us improve policies or find the best ways to get our message out.

Check out these tips we've learned along the way while engaging school choice opponents.

1. **First, are they being sarcastic?** For instance, you don't want to send a positive reply to someone who is actually mocking you.
2. **Ask questions** to gauge how much they know and their intentions before passing judgment.
3. **Be human.** Acknowledge, consider and challenge differing perspectives. Try to find common ground.
4. **Correct misinformation** and provide evidence.
5. **Find the weak spot.** When confronted with facts that refute their claims, opponents of school choice will do one of four things:
 - divert/twist/avoid/change the subject
 - If they do this, you've found the weak spot. Bring the argument back to educational choice and putting families first.
 - attack your character
 - If they do this, stay positive. Make it clear that you won't engage if they can't return the same respect you've shown them.
 - head for the hills
 - If they do this, their silence is often a sign that they know their argument is flawed.
 - change their opinion based on the information you've provided (This is rare, but great!)
 - If they do this, thank them for being open minded.
6. **Play chess** by anticipating how they might answer your questions and identifying potential dead-ends.
7. **Find an end goal.** Did they reveal a weak spot? That is your target. Do not let them get away with avoiding that question.

Proven winner: What if you were that parent and that were your child? How your opponent answers this line of questioning will reveal a lot about them, their biases and their character.

8. **Keep steering the conversation back to your end goal.**
9. **Going in circles? Bow out** because they'll never answer your question, and you're unlikely to persuade them.

Finally ... At all stages of a debate with opponents, mind that you:

1. Stay polite and respectful
2. Always back up your claims with research and examples
3. Don't take the emotional bait
4. Walk away when the conversation is over

Now, go forth, spread the word about school choice and take on opponents with skill and grace!

We hope you found these strategies helpful. If you have feedback, questions or would like more advanced information on this topic, inquire about our trainings by emailing media@edchoice.org.