

## UnifiEd Experience and Reaction

UnifiEd is an organization that is working towards making the Hamilton County School System better for the children within it. Our experiences with the organization included training in their office and door-to-door policy advocacy. On Thursday, we visited UnifiEd and received training about the proposed budget increase for the Hamilton County School System and how to best advocate for this policy change within the community. On Sunday, we went door-to-door advocating for the budget with community members.

### **Training**

During the training on Thursday, we learned many statistics about the current functioning of the school system. According to the fact sheets that UnifiEd gave us, only 1 in 3 students in Hamilton County can read at grade level by the time they reach third grade. Additionally, Hamilton County ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> in the state of Tennessee in starting teacher pay. Hamilton County is also below the suggested minimum requirements in the areas of school social workers, counselors, and special education programs. The proposed budget would work in several areas to improve Hamilton County Schools by increasing the budget by \$34 million. The budget, which has already passed the school board, would give all of the teachers a 5% raise, higher 35 additional literacy coaches, increase the number of school counselors by 20%, provide additional art programs, increase special education programs, provide Early Post-Secondary Opportunities (EPSOS), and increase technology availability in the classrooms. Following learning about the budget, we learned how to effectively advocate for it while going door-to-door. We were to follow a sequence that included our introduction, questions about the community members experiences with the school system, our presentation on the budget (with relevant facts based on

the community member's experience), our ask (sign the petition, etc.), and thank them for their time.

## **Advocacy**

Sunday was the big day. We took what we learned during our training and put it into practice in the community. I paired up with Anna and we went to our first street. At first, nobody was answering the doors and we wondered if we would get the chance to talk to anybody at all. Finally, someone answered the door and I took the lead on our first house. Unfortunately, the people at this house were not very receptive nor kind. I have been door-to-door before and am used to being turned away, so I was not negatively affected by their rudeness. Every house we went to after that was receptive to our cause. Actually, pretty much every answered door after that, we got a petition signed. We spent a little over two hours knocking on doors, and by the end of our time in the community, we only had one unsigned petition left. It was a hot outside, but the work was rewarding.

## **Reaction**

Overall, I had a good experience working with UnifiEd. It was my first time going door-to-door for policy advocacy, so I am thankful for that unique opportunity. I could see myself doing it again if it were for an issue that I felt very passionate about, such as for women's issues or for the geriatric population. I believe that this experience gave me the tools and inspiration that I would need to continue to do policy advocacy within my community and for my future clients.