

Schools for Equity in Education

Preparing for Action--Suggestions for Effective Citizen Lobbying

Legislators appreciate hearing from their constituents on important issues. For education to become and stay a priority, state legislators must hear from education supporters across the state. Together, we can all make a difference by being informed and engaged in the legislative process.

1. **Become informed about the issues that impact your schools.**

Learn how schools are funded. Find out how from your school district how your local schools are impacted by specific legislation. Gather information on how individual schools, classrooms, programs, and students are affected. Be ready to share your own personal stories of how decisions made by legislators impact your child's classroom.

2. **Get to know your legislators.**

Legislators try their best to represent their constituents. Therefore, they need to hear from the people they represent. Get to know the people who represent you. Developing a good working relationship with your legislators is the first step in being able to work with them effectively in the future.

- Schedule a meeting with your local legislators and invite other interested parents and community members.
- Look for other opportunities, such as constituent meetings, that many legislators hold in their home districts.
- Use your time with your legislator to introduce yourself and to discuss some of your concerns. Find out the best way to communicate with your legislator in the future. Ask how you can be of help to them in addressing your concerns.

3. **Discuss your concerns with others and encourage them to get involved.**

Talk with other parents, your neighbors, and friends about your shared concerns. Share with them how important it is that they get involved. Help build a grassroots effort to make funding for public education a priority.

4. **Know when, what, and how to communicate with your legislator and other key officials.** Knowing the right time, the right information, and the best method of communicating can make all the difference in citizen lobbying.

- Work with other community members to develop a communication system within your district that can be used when needed to alert others to an immediate call for action.
- Be prepared to contact your legislators, as well as key committee chairs, legislative leaders, and the Governor.
- Consider hosting an event at which people can write letters to their legislators and key state leaders. Provide updated information, key points, and sample letters.

5. **Meet with your legislator to discuss a specific issue or concern. Share the need. Share your views. Share the facts.**

- Call in advance to schedule a meeting. Meet them at the Capitol or arrange a location in your community.
- If a legislator's schedule is full, you may be able to meet briefly between committee meetings. Ask if this is a possibility.
- Prepare ahead of time, so that you can provide accurate information and facts.
- Share specific examples and personal stories of how proposed legislation will impact students in your community.
- Be friendly and polite.
- Listen respectfully to his or her responses.
- Know the different viewpoints so that you can respond effectively.
- Ask your legislator for his or her position on the issue.
- Ask if he or she has any questions.
- If you are unsure about something, it is okay to say you don't know, but will find the answer.
- Offer to follow-up with the requested information.
- Ask you legislator how you can work with him or her on the issue.
- Follow up with a thank you letter.

6. **Know how to write effective letters and/or e-mails to legislators.**

Elected officials read their mail and note the issues that are of concern to their constituents. A logical, courteous letter or e-mail can impact a legislator's decision making. Your letter lets legislators know how you feel about a

particular issue. It can change a legislator's mind, particularly when he or she is wavering on an issue. Letters can also let a legislator, who is working on your behalf, know that you support their efforts.

To be most effective, consider the following points when writing:

- Be as brief as possible—one page is sufficient, unless you are including new information.
- Address your letter properly (Dear Senator/Representative/Governor). Check the spelling of all names.
- State the reason about which you are writing at the beginning of the letter. If you are writing about a specific piece of legislation, include the name of the bill and its House or Senate file number. If the legislator is the bill's author, acknowledge it. Address only one issue per letter.
- State your position on the issue. Be clear how you want your legislator to respond or vote.
- Identify yourself and your school district by name. Note if you are a constituent in his or her district.
- State your reasons for supporting or opposing the legislation. Use facts and personal experiences/situations to support your position. Use your letter to educate elected officials about the potential impact of their vote on local schools, students, families, and teachers.
- Thank the legislator for considering your views. Always send a note of appreciation if your legislator supports your issue.
- Always include your name and address on both the letter and the envelope.

7. Call your legislator and other elected officials to let them know you support or oppose specific legislation.

Phone calls are a way of communicating with legislators and other elected officials when an immediate response is needed. If the legislator is unable to take your call, you will be able to leave a message with staff or on voicemail. Your call will be more effective if you are prepared with a few notes.

- Include your name and address. Be sure to identify yourself (constituent, parent) and why this issue is important to you.
- Refer to the name of the legislation and its House or Senate file number.
- State if you are in support or opposition to the legislation. Be clear about how you want your legislator to vote.
- Briefly explain the impact of the legislation on your school district.
- Be sure to say thank you for considering your concerns.

8. Attend committee meetings. Write and present testimony.

Bills are assigned to be heard and discussed in a committee. These meetings are open to the public with seating available on a first come basis. During these meetings, the bill's sponsor will present the bill to the committee members. Staff may be asked to present additional testimony and answer questions from the committee members. Proponents and opponents of the bill are given an opportunity to testify as time permits. If you are interested in testifying, it is important that you call the committee's administrator and ask to be put on the list of speakers. If you attend the hearing, but do not testify, you can communicate with committee members before or immediately after the hearing to reinforce your position.

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