

Practical Tips for Contacting Lawmakers

- **Identify your lawmakers.** The Washington State Legislative Home Page (www.leg.wa.gov) can help you find your state legislators and federal Congressional members with a click of the mouse. You can also track the status of a particular bill—and your lawmaker’s vote on that bill—from this site.
- **Know and use proper titles.** When speaking to a state legislator, let the situation dictate the form of address. In a public setting, lawmakers should be recognized by their formal titles—even if you know them personally. (Examples: Senator Smith, Representative Jones, Governor Wilson).
- **When calling on government officials, dress appropriately.** Formal meetings call for professional [business] attire, as do appearances before legislative committees. Many hearings are also taped for broadcast on the governmental affairs TV channel.
- **Get to the point. In plain English.** Legislators are busy people and have little time for long explanations. And many lawmakers are not familiar with the language of education (e.g. AYP, Title I, ELL, SIP). Summarize your points in writing, too, so that you can submit your concerns after your meeting concludes.
- **Know the issues—the pros and the cons.** It’s true that there’s more than one side to a story, and chances are, your lawmaker has heard all of them. Know the arguments of your issue and be prepared to hear all sides. Lawmakers also like to hear practical suggestions about the issues; be prepared to offer realistic solutions.
- **Get to know your lawmakers.** Like any other relationship in your life, your connection with lawmakers must be tended to carefully. Take time after the busy legislative session to invite members to your school for a visit. Or add them to your newsletter distribution list so they can follow your school’s progress.
- **Don’t overlook legislative staff.** Aides and committee staff are critical to the legislative process. In fact, legislators rely heavily on their knowledge of the issues for gathering information and analysis. They are also more accessible than many lawmakers, and can become an important ally in your efforts to discuss an issue or idea with a lawmaker. You can also become a valuable resource for them in sharing your knowledge of the K-12 world.
- **Use multiple means of communication.** Technology can connect you with lawmakers by phone, fax and e-mail. But don’t overlook the value of face-to-face, sit down meetings back home in your district, especially after session concludes.