



FIVE FAST FACTS

Tips for contacting or meeting with legislators

School board members need to be proactive in communicating with lawmakers throughout the year. As a board member, you serve as a leader in governing public school districts with an understanding of what is necessary to provide, sustain and improve public education in Ohio. Issues that are important to public education and your local school district should be discussed with your legislators. You may not agree on everything but at least you'll know where they stand and they will have an opportunity to hear your position.



Your participation in the advocacy of public education is vital to OSBA's legislative efforts. As a board member, you are in a unique position to provide information about education policy from a local perspective. The following are a tips for contacting legislators on issues impacting public education.

1. Before making contact, keep in mind the following questions a legislator may ask about your concern or suggestion:

- Does this make sense? A legislator — who by definition is pressed for time — will ask how the desired action measures against common sense.
- Is this a topic of narrow self-interest or of broad interest? Legislators are far more receptive to general public good than narrow special interests.
- How will this effect my district? All politics are local, and every legislator wonders how a proposal will play at home.
- Will it help me politically? Who will be the supporters or opposition? Legislators want to know if an issue will help or hurt their re-election chances.
- Do any constituents know or care about this? Nothing compares to hearing from the people who vote for the legislator.

FAST FIVE FACTS ON TIPS FOR CONTACTING OR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

RESOURCES

Effective advocacy for school leaders

<http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/33658>



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OSBA leads the way to educational excellence by serving Ohio's public school board members and the diverse districts they represent through superior service, unwavering advocacy and creative solutions.

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2. If you can satisfy each of the previous questions for a legislator, you are well on your way to obtaining his or her support. The following are advocacy techniques to avoid:

- Legal memos: Legislators don't have the time or patience to wade through a legal document.
- Glossy kits with lots of inserts: It may look pretty but given the time constraints on most legislators, bullet points on a piece of paper is more effective.
- Jargon-filled communication: Legislators don't know — and don't want to know — the profession's jargon.
- Letters that only refer to bill numbers: Time-pressed legislators do not have the time to look up a bill number to reference what you are talking about.
- Picketing, rallies and demonstrations: Use substance over showmanship.
- Petitions: Only use as a last resort since their effectiveness is questionable.

3. The following techniques are effective when contacting or meeting with your legislator:

- Have important, powerful people meet with the legislator: Legislators like to feel respected for their efforts. Meetings with important people show you understand the importance of the legislative process.
- Personal letters from constituents that begin with "As your constituent I urge you to ...": Nothing greases the wheels like hearing from a constituent or voter. Bullet points in the letter make it even more effective.
- Personal visits and/or phone calls by constituents: These work best when the legislator has the time to listen so he or she can learn about the issue.
- Remember to keep your message and request simple.

4. Above all, always close the deal.

Be persistent with the legislator. At the end of the meeting or close of your letter, ask if the legislator will support your cause. If the legislator puts you off, ask when you can expect him or her to make a decision. Call back or visit again at that time. Always follow up on any contact you make with a legislator.

5. Let OSBA know of your efforts.

Inform the OSBA legislative staff of your efforts to contact legislators. This helps provide an accurate picture of current advocacy efforts by board members and OSBA staff.