

2018 Tips for Engaging Your Indiana Legislatures

As the 2018 Indiana General Assembly holds its legislative “short” session January through mid-March, your Department of Education is encouraging educators to stay in communication with their local legislators. As advocates for students, the Department is dedicated to working with the General Assembly to give students the support needed to be successful. Listening to feedback from those working every day with students is essential to providing members with a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities our educators encounter.

While writing or calling a Representative or Senator might seem intimidating or difficult, the process is easier than most would believe. Effective communication goes a long way when contacting your legislators. Mike Brown, Director of Legislative Affairs for the Department, has eight simple tips to make communicating beneficial for sender and recipient alike.

1) **Know Your Legislators:** Enter your address [here](#) to find who your legislators are in your area. From there you can email or call each of them with your thoughts. Be sure to let them know that you are a constituent. While hearing from Hoosiers is important, legislators really like to hear from constituents who live in districts they represent.

2) **Do Not be Afraid to Engage:** Legislators want to hear from constituents about issues that matter most. Hearing from you will encourage them to make well-informed decisions. If they do not hear from you, then bills may pass that greatly impact the field without known positive or negative effects.

3) **Be Concise:** Any initial communication should include the following:

- a) Your name, school you represent, and mention if you are a constituent;
- b) The topic or issue you want to discuss;
- c) Clearly explain your opposition or support;
- d) Include personal experiences or data;
- e) Offer alternative solutions, if necessary;
- f) Thank them for their time and list your home address, email, and phone number in the signature line.

4) **Follow-Up if Necessary:** Just like us, legislators are busy people. Do not worry if they fail to get back with you immediately. If a week or two passes since your initial communication, send them a follow-up email or phone call.

5) **Commonality:** If you request a one-on-one meeting, be respectful of the legislator’s time and try to gather other like-minded teachers or administrators to attend with you. Find a date and time that works for all or most to talk to your legislator. Be sure to let the legislator know well in advance if other people will be attending the meeting and ask if others will accompany the legislator as well.

6) **Be Confident:** Engaging legislators may seem like an intimidating task. It is not. They, too, are people with personal beliefs and feelings. Conversations will quickly bloom when your confidence is at its peak. Remain calm and professional throughout all communications.

7) **Respect Opinions:** If a legislator does not agree with your position on a particular issue, then that should be respected. Kindly thank them for their time and ask that they nonetheless consider your opinion before a final vote is cast.

8) **Share Your School:** Invite your legislator to your school throughout the school year. Show them the great work that you and your school are doing for students. It is important for legislators to see first-hand the interworking's and complexities of daily school life.

Following these simple tips will assist in a successful dialogue between your Senator, Representative, and you. Our input is extremely valuable to the legislative process. Together, we can highlight the challenges and opportunities our schools face.