

Tips for your success!

Building Positive Relationships with Newly-Elected Legislators



Even though election day has come and gone, the next step in the election cycle is about to begin; it is time to build positive relationships and communicate with your newly-elected leaders. Here are a few tips to help district build a positive relationship from the start:

- 1. Know your district's expectations relative to conversations with legislators before you schedule an appointment.** For most districts, the superintendent is designated to represent the district when it comes to discussing policy. Look to your employee handbook for clarification. If you are granted permission to schedule an appointment, make sure your superintendent is aware of what you plan to discuss. Be sure to provide a summary after the meeting as well so that your school leader is aware of any other issues that may need to be addressed.
- 2. Become a trusted resource.** There is a significant learning curve when an individual transitions from candidate to legislator. Not only does she need to learn how to navigate the legislative process, but is also learning how she can support her constituents using state and federal resources. To assist the new legislator in her learning, become a reliable and trusted resource. Let her know that you can explain education issues and their impact on students. Be available to answer questions at any time. Consider providing the legislator with your cell phone number so that she can call you while commuting or during legislative session.
- 3. Get to know the staff.** Legislative staff members are the gatekeepers to the legislator. Often, elected leaders delegate research to the Chief of Staff or Legislative Analyst. Be supportive of their work by answering their questions in a timely manner.
- 4. Know your legislator's committee assignments as well as track the bills that he introduces, co-signs and supports.** Often, education topics are addressed in meetings that may not be directly assigned to education-related committees (lottery revenue, tax allocations, retirement, roads, water testing, etc.). By following discussions and tracking bills, school districts can provide information and clarification on issues that may inadvertently impact education. To track bills in the Michigan House and Senate, learn about committee hearing agendas, and to find bill summaries, visit the [Michigan Legislature](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/) website (<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/>).
- 5. Offer opportunities for the legislator to shine! Invite your elected leaders to events at your school that also highlight legislative initiatives.** For example, if your state representative is working to expand housing options in your community, invite him to help build a house being constructed by your building and trades program. Not only will this allow the legislator to further his cause, but he will also learn about how your district's educational programs support needs in the community.
- 6. Invite staff too.** When inviting a legislator to participate in an activity (or when scheduling a meeting) always include an opportunity for a staff member to come, in addition to or in lieu of, the representative. All events and meetings that are covered by staff are assigned by the elected leader. This means that the legislator will expect an update as to what occurred in their absence.
- 7. Understand legislative scheduling.** Both Michigan's [House and Senate calendars](http://www.legislature.mi.gov/) are posted online (<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/>). Session days are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, allowing legislators to spend time in their districts on Monday and Friday each week. Consider scheduling local meetings and school events on those days in which the legislators are in their home districts.

For more guidance on school communication, please visit us at www.mspra.org.

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8. **Let the children do the talking.** When a legislator visits your school, allow students to showcase what they are learning. Legislators often enjoy interacting with students and learning about their current projects. The legislator may want to take photos of her experience and share it on social media (have photo releases on file)!
9. **Take a road trip.** Travel to Lansing or to a district office. If you cannot make a Monday or a Friday meeting work in the district, travel to your legislator's office. Keep your meeting to 20-30 minutes. Be sure to have a specific agenda. Write talking points to help stay on topic.
10. **Remember, legislators are busy.** Sometimes your legislator may need to delay or cancel your meeting. Do not be upset. In most cases, he wants to meet with you however, a committee meeting or caucus discussion mandates that his schedule be adjusted. When this occurs, ask to meet with a staff member instead.
11. **Staff members are important people.** Do not be discouraged if a district representative or staff member is asked to meet with you on behalf of the legislator. They are just as eager to see the district and its constituents be successful. Staffers will share what was discussed with the legislator and work to follow-up if needs are expressed. Staff members may include a chief of staff, legislative analyst, committee clerk, constituent relations director, communication director, scheduler, district representative and receptionist. Meeting with any of these individuals will be time well-spent.
12. **Speak to legislators/staff in their language.** Consider discussing education programs using impact scenarios instead of FTEs or IEP goals. For example, "Our mechatronics program has partnered with ABC business in our community. ABC guarantees the employment of 35 students upon high school graduation," or "The school lunch program prevents 162 area residents from going hungry over the summer." Impact scenarios help paint a picture for the legislator that relates back to her district and helps her gain a better understanding of your school's work.
13. **Leave a memento.** Instead of a brochure or a white paper on the topic that you discussed, leave something with the legislator that creates a lasting memory. Remember, legislators are busy people. They meet with a lot of concerned citizens and officials throughout the course of their day. How will your information stand out? Are you discussing Career and Technical Education programs? Ask your students to weld a mini sculpture for the legislator to display in their Lansing office or have your culinary students prepare a meal for office staff. Are you discussing the teacher shortage? Invite your elementary students to make a book of thank-you letters that they write to their teachers about the gift of reading and how important teachers are in their lives. Present the book to the legislator as an invitation to work together to strengthen the profession. Be creative (and positive) and be sure your school's brand is incorporated in the gift!

