

Communicating with Your Elected Officials

TEPSA recognizes the need for elected officials to hear from school leaders – their voting constituency – about issues affecting PreK-8 education and the principalship. You can make a difference by voting and keeping legislators informed of issues affecting your school and community. **Our primary goal is to mobilize members to communicate key education messages with lawmakers which, in turn, impacts legislators' positions and votes on issues.**

Personal visits with legislators and/or staff members (in Austin or in the district) are important, as well as phone calls and personal correspondence. **By keeping your legislator informed about the importance of elementary education in Texas, you ensure that TEPSA has a voice in the legislature.** Build relationships and keep the lines of communication open.

The Personal Visit

Some suggested tips for a personal visit:

- Don't be nervous or intimidated. You are a taxpayer and a voter in the legislator's district. Elected officials work for you. You are the expert on elementary education.
- Turn off your cell phone. Never answer a cell phone during a visit.
- Don't waste valuable time worrying about chairs, water, etc.
- Be patient and respectful.
- Pick up (or request) business cards for legislators and staff members.
- Be personal and friendly. Introduce yourself and where you live, your school, etc.
- Be concise. Keep it short and to the point. A meeting usually lasts 15 – 30 minutes. Don't lose track of time.
- Don't go off message. Don't attempt to answer a question if you don't know the answer.
- Be a good listener. It's important for the legislator or staff member to have their views heard.
- Remember all politics are local. Tell your story. Illustrate your point by providing examples from your school or community.
- Agree to disagree (politely).
- Be responsive. Be willing to follow up with more information if they express an interest or ask a question you are not prepared to answer.
- Be gracious. Thank them for their time and follow-up with a letter or email. Invite them to visit your school.

The Phone Call

Used correctly, the telephone call can be an effective action tool. It is a quick and easy method of communication.

- Be prepared and informed by calling at a strategic time (before a vote, in response to a TEPSA legislative alert).
- Identify yourself as a constituent. Give your name, your position, your school, etc.
- Ask to speak with the legislator or the staff member working on education issues. Give the staff member the same information (and respect) you planned to give the legislator. Your message will be communicated.
- If no one is available to take your call, leave a message asking them to return your call.

- State your position (support or opposition) on the bill and the reasons for your support or opposition – and how it would affect your school and/or students. Tell your story.
- Thank the listener for their time. Invite them to visit your school.

Letters/Emails

- Written communication is a commonly used contact method in any advocacy program.
- Stay focused on the issue(s) and use your own words in describing your support or opposition to the issue(s) and the reasons for your support or opposition.
- Personalization is very important. Form letters are ignored.

Some suggested tips for a letter or email:

- Include your name, position, school, address, phone number and date.
- Be brief and to the point. (Introduction, position, reasons, closing.)
- Be candid and personal. Use your own words on how an issue would affect your school and/or students. Tell your story.
- Be certain about documentation. Include details pertinent to the issue. Do not exaggerate or fabricate.
- Be appreciative. Understand that legislators represent a diverse constituency. Invite them to visit your school.

TEPSA seeks to support, promote and enhance elementary education and the principalship in Texas by encouraging members to effectively communicate with members of the legislature on issues of importance.