

## How to organize a meeting with lawmakers so they can be your voice at the Capitol

1. Gather a group that is passionate about improving public education in your community. The local superintendent or an administrator who has a good understanding of school budgets might be included, as well as school board members, parents, business leaders, teachers, and other citizens who have a stake in the health of the local school district. Eight to 15 people would be ideal.
2. Schedule a time to meet monthly with your local legislative delegation starting in December and going through the end of the legislative session in April. During the legislative session, lawmakers convene in Jackson on Monday afternoon and adjourn Thursday evening or Friday morning. Scheduling a meeting Monday morning, late Friday afternoon or over the weekend will be the best way to make sure lawmakers are available to meet face-to-face.
3. Consider focusing on one topic at each meeting such as school funding, special education, vouchers, charter schools, elected superintendents, accountability standards, or any other issue that is important to your community. Do your research and talk with local administrators to understand specific needs in your district. The Parents' Campaign Research and Education Fund can provide you facts and data about education issues.
4. Tell personal stories. What are local examples of how underfunding hurts teachers and students? What are the local implications of state mandates?
5. Don't assume that lawmakers know the issues. Lawmakers (particularly those who are newly elected) may have no background in education or personal experience with public schools. Your group can serve as the education "experts" for lawmakers, providing them with information they need to cast important votes.
6. Ask directly for their support: "Will you vote 'for' more funding?" or "Will you vote 'no' on vouchers?" Let them know you will review their votes at the next meeting.
7. Always be reasonable. Stay calm and polite. Don't make sweeping, disrespectful statements about legislators. (Be tough on the issues, not on the people.)
8. If you don't know the answer to a question from a lawmaker, say so. Say that you will find out, and then be sure to follow up.
9. Take notes on what lawmakers say and share this information with stakeholders who may not be able to attend meetings. If legislators miss the meeting, follow up by phone. Use social media tactfully to keep community members informed.
10. Don't be intimidated. Your voice and your perspective matter. Most lawmakers want to represent their constituents and appreciate input from their community.

**Our duty as voters, educators, and parents is to communicate regularly with lawmakers about legislative issues that affect public schools. Lawmakers cannot "be our voice" unless we express our priorities to them and let them know the policies we support.**

"We in this country have a sacred right, one that our forefathers died for ... that concept is that the people govern themselves and the people have a voice in their government. On the state level, that voice is exercised through the Legislature. The people have the right to govern themselves."  
– Speaker of the House,  
Philip Gunn, *Clarion-Ledger*,  
October 27, 2015

"We are here to represent the people."  
- Representative Greg Snowden,  
*Neshoba Democrat*,  
January 14, 2015

"You have the right to govern yourselves on matters of public policy and funding through the legislature."  
- Speaker of the House,  
Philip Gunn, *Columbus Packet*,  
November 1, 2015