



# Time to Engage with Legislators

Decisions are made every day the Legislature is in session that directly or indirectly impact school districts.

As a school official, your voice is needed in Springfield to help keep unintended consequences of legislation out of the classroom.

As you prepare to engage with your Legislators, keep these tips in mind...

- 1 Be mindful of when you communicate**—Ask about their communication preferences during sessions. Be persistent but also understand the timing of the issue you'd like to discuss.
- 2 Know your issue and the process**—Understand the process (see the attached How a Bill becomes a Law in Illinois) and keep track of the status of the bill.
- 3 Understand the need for give and take**—Like every good relationship, this one has two sides. Making the extra effort to support your legislator goes a long way.
- 4 Take advantage of the “off-season”**—When the legislators are not in session (typically June—October) is a great time to meet in person and open up the lines of communication.

## DO

**BE FIRM**—Bring along facts and figures to support your case and be clear in your position.

**LEAVE SOMETHING IN WRITING**—A single page, bulleted version of your argument they can refer back to.

**COMPROMISE**—It's better to get some things you want even if you can't get everything. If you can't defeat a bill, dilute it.

**PERSONALIZE**—Understand how the issue specifically affects your district and say it in your own words.

**KEEP YOUR WORD**—If you promise to provide information, drop everything and get it to them. This builds trust.

**KEEP TRACK**—Follow the legislation through the process and update bill numbers and positions accordingly.

**KNOW THE OTHER SIDE**—Understand the opposing view and give specific and factual rebuttals.

**SAY “THANK YOU”**—If they helped your position, let them know. Show them your support by attending events when the legislature is not in session.

## DON'T

**BE ARGUMENTATIVE**—You can never win an argument with a legislator, so don't start one. Never threaten or lose your cool.

**WRITE A BOOK**—Your legislator doesn't have time to read a 10 page historical document, rather they need common sense and simple arguments.

**GIVE UP**—Be persistent in communicating your views. At the same time, don't waste time lobbying opponents who are publicly opposed to your position.

**WASTE THEIR TIME**—With form letters and mass mailings that don't give new information.

**PROMISE SOMETHING YOU CAN'T DELIVER**—This is a quick way to lose credibility in the relationship.

**COME UNPREPARED**—Be respectful of your legislators' time, especially during busy in-session times.

**EXPECT TO ALWAYS GET YOUR WAY**—Be willing to forgive, but not forget

**BURN BRIDGES**—Thank your legislator for considering your position. Restate your position and say you look forward to future discussions.