

Communicating with Policymakers

Talking to policymakers can feel intimidating, especially knowing that you only have a short window of time to make your key points. With that in mind, it's critically important to be prepared with talking points and messages ahead of time.

In communications with policymakers, you should:

- **Point out something useful they have done.** Everyone wants to make a difference—decision-makers and elected officials need to hear how their actions have directly or indirectly helped students and schools.
- **Know your ask.** Decision-makers, elected officials, and their staffs like it when people are clear and up-front. They understand that you are interacting with them for a reason. The faster and clearer you are, the more they appreciate it. Just remember to be polite!
- **Say it with brevity.** Remember that policymakers are not (for the most part) education experts, and that their next vote might be about a completely different topic. Include only key details and avoid jargon in your “ask.” Do include information on how it will help students—it gives context and makes the ask easier to remember.
- **Make the right ask to the right person.** Make sure that a policymaker has the jurisdiction to do what you are asking them to—for instance, your federal representatives have influence over Title I funding, while your local city or county council sets the property tax rate that controls local education funding.
- **Say “thank you” for their time and consideration.** Most policymakers receive quite a bit of constituent feedback, and much of it is not nice. Even if you disagree with their stands, gratitude can go a long way.

If you are writing a letter or email, use the format of a sharp opening, two or three concise paragraphs and a compelling closing. If you have the chance to converse at a reception or other event, speak for about 45 seconds. Make your ask and say, “I will send you a note about this.” And be sure to follow up.

If you don't know who is your federal member of Congress go to: <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>. If you have other questions or are wondering who you should write to, check with your professional association.

Not all communications end up with a yes, but it works out better in the long run if you build a relationship and keep an open line for conversations.

Interested in learning more about how to communicate effectively with policymakers?

The [National PTA offers a toolkit](#) designed to help advocates speak up for the health and well-being of all children.

The [National Association of Elementary School Principals \(NAESP\) article “From Educator to Advocate”](#) offers simple strategies to help educators amplify their voices as advocates for students and schools at the local, state, and national levels.

An [AASA, the School Superintendents Association feature “Advice to Advocates”](#) showcases state policymakers' tips on effective advocacy.