

## Parents (or any school district official) and the Legislative Process

### I. Within Your District

Always coordinate your efforts with district administration. Open communication among district personnel: superintendent, principals, or whoever is working with you on legislative and budget issues is critical. Working together is the key to success when addressing these important issues that impact our student's academic success.

Develop a phone tree through which information can be disseminated quickly and efficiently.

Twenty or thirty people who can be counted on to make calls and to write letters are more effective than 100 who may or may not follow through

- The best policy is to NOT send form letters or form e-mails. If time does not permit formulation of individual letters, form letters are better than nothing, however they should be used sparingly.
- When making a phone call, oftentimes you will not be able to speak with the Legislator, however, this is a good opportunity to speak with the Assistant and leave your message with her/him. If you call on several issues, "getting to know" the Assistant is a wonderful idea. A meeting may be an option in the future. It helps to build a rapport with the Assistant as she/he will be instrumental in scheduling the Legislator's time. ***Be very respectful of the Assistant*** – they could make or break your opportunity to meet with the Legislator – they are very important people!

"Observer Group" -- individuals who will attend committee meetings (or follow from ALIS) at the Legislature as needed: keep an eye on what's going on; and report back. Several individuals may be needed because various committee meetings may happen at the same time. Committee meetings can be followed from your home computer from the Arizona Legislative Website [www.azleg.state.az.us](http://www.azleg.state.az.us) and follow the links under House and Senate to Live Proceedings. The Committee agendas are also available, as well as information on bills. You can utilize ALIS for a majority of your information gathering.

- Be prepared to speak during a committee hearing. Be sure you have coordinated your message if you are representing the District and not just yourself. If you want to speak or just voice your opinion for or against a bill – with or without speaking you can sign up on the Request to Speak kiosk – once you have officially logged in you can give your opinion from your remote location – home computer. Legislators prefer to hear directly from parents and citizens vs. lobbyists and administrators.
- KNOW THE ISSUES. Legislators will most likely ask questions to gain more specific information. Be prepared to respond – if you don't know the answer, tell the legislator that you will research the question and get back to them with the answer. **Don't try to "wing" it.** Incomplete or incorrect information can be more damaging than honestly admitting you don't know the answer and will get the requested information. **BE SURE TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THE ANSWER.**

Keep in contact with key folks from your school and school district. Communication is critical to delivering consistent information. Be sure to relay information back to other parents and district personnel. It is always important to give feedback on opinions and perceptions that you received while at the legislature and meeting with legislators.

## **II. At the Legislature**

Understand the legislative process. Know the cycle of a bill and how it moves through the process.

Become familiar with information areas: Chief Clerk's Office in the House of Representative; Senate Secretary's Office in the Senate; both information desk personnel; mail room (to pick up copies of bills, etc.). Locate hearing rooms and identify specific staff members who could be helpful. Be sure to include both the majority and minority staff people. *Don't over communicate* – **watch and listen** to learn how the process works, and how best you can utilize the process to accomplish your goals.

Monitor the legislation: ALIS is on the Internet. Arizona Legislative Information Service – [www.azleg.state.az.us](http://www.azleg.state.az.us). This website contains a wealth of information on who are your legislators; finding which legislative district you are in; links to other websites, i.e. Governor's Website, and many other useful links that can assist in your endeavors.

## **III. Legislators**

Know your legislators. Legislators would rather hear from YOU than a lobbyist. Read the bio of each legislator before a visit or even before you send a letter or e-mail. Legislative e-mails are filling up fast and oftentimes hard to manage, however, a phone call can be made to the Assistant to say: I want to express my opinion on HB2222 – I'm in favor; or I'm not in favor. You may or may not want to say more. You can ask if the Assistant would like additional information or just your name, number and comment. You may also ask if she/he would like for you to send a follow-up letter or e-mail. That way it's at their discretion. Believe me they do take this information seriously. Legislators have made statements like: I have received 25 calls on this bill, all were opposed, or ½ were opposed and ½ were in favor. They do log your comments and utilize when making decisions on bills, especially if you are a constituent – you are a voting member of their public. If you are contacting Members on a Committee regarding a certain bill, these calls are still very valuable.

**LISTEN** to what they have to say. Ascertain what they know and understand regarding the issues **before** you jump in. **ASK** where they stand on the issue before you tell them what you think they should do. Get a sense as to **WHY** they feel the way they do – it gives you a better opportunity to respond with an answer that could provide the “other side to the issue” without simply saying you don't agree with their view. If you **UNDERSTAND** where they are, you can provide **DATA** to support your position and you will have a much better opportunity to influence their decision. **NEVER TAKE THEIR OPINION FOR GRANTED; NEVER MAKE IT PERSONAL** – especially on education issues, many legislators have family members that have been or are public school teachers, etc. and those family members have expressed their support or concerns on a variety of issues – you want to avoid pitting your opinion against their family member. **Be respectful of their opinion**, even if it is in conflict with your opinion. Agree to disagree; be honest; be on time and don't overstay your time allotted. **Don't make it personal** – you are there to discuss legislation. Don't take the answers personally, especially if you disagree. Be prepared to **WAIT and WAIT and WAIT** – but wait patiently! Remember they are the Elected Official and have many demands on their time so waiting is a virtue. Actually it may give you time to chat with the Doorman, or others as you wait and these are the folks that can assist or not in the future. **Keep a good attitude.**

**LIMIT** your discussions to one or two issues. (Check voting records for accurate information regarding how the legislator voted on an issue.) Again, this can be done on the ALIS website. **STICK to the facts (most of the time they may not understand the issue fully – don't confuse them with side issues!)** Don't talk over their head; don't use educational lingo; don't talk baby talk; don't assume they know. **ASK** how you can be a resource to them.

**INVITE** the legislator to visit your district – discuss with superintendents, principals, etc. first. It's generally harder to vote NO when they are looking at students and not just voting against the bureaucracy of public education.

**END YOUR INTERVIEW** with: can I provide any further information to assist in your decision-making? Ending with a question requires a response from your official, and that's what you came for. **DON'T** press them if they hesitate, and **DON'T** push for the answer you are looking for. **RESPECT** their position and try to put together information that might be helpful in addressing their concerns. Information is powerful, but again, respect their position.

**FOLLOW-UP** the visit with a thank you note for his/her time. Send any materials or information you promised during the meeting and do it **PROMPTLY**. One great tool regarding e-mails: if you put THANK YOU in the subject line, it generally gets their attention to read. Most of the e-mails are ASKING for something, but most people forget to THANK THEM. **A personal note is also nice.**

**SEND** Thank You notes for votes! After critical votes have taken place during the legislative session, send thank you notes for appropriate votes. This confirms your position and support for the legislators during session. It also indicates that you tracking certain bills and following the process and the voting. It also provides the opportunity to be **POSITIVE** and not just negative; reward the good votes; then you will be able to explain an issue when it may be negative.

**Address/Phone Numbers:**

The Honorable  
Arizona House of Representatives  
1700 W. Washington  
Phoenix, AZ 85007  
Information Desk: (602) 926-4221  
Chief Clerk's Office (602) 926-3032

The Honorable  
Arizona State Senate  
1700 W. Washington  
Phoenix, AZ 85007  
Information Desk: (602) 926-3559  
Senate Secretary's Office (602) 926-4231

**Source: Greater Phoenix Educational Management Council (GPEMC)  
Dianne Smith, Executive Director (623) 772-2214 Office**