

# TASA Advocacy 101

## Do's, Don'ts and Tips

**A**dvocacy is critical. Approximately 5.4 million children depend on Texas public schools! It's your privilege and responsibility to contact Texas legislators about issues important to you. While the Legislature meets only once every two years for regular sessions, legislators' offices are open year-round.

**You are the expert. Make your voice heard.**

### Steps to Take to Make Your Voice Heard

- Determine who represents you.
- Make phone calls.
- Visit legislators in their Austin and local offices.
- Write emails and letters.
- Provide public testimony at hearings.
- Know the basics of the legislative process.
- Share stories of the good things you see happening in your public schools – with legislators, within your community, and even on social media.
- VOTE!

### How to Find Out Who Represents You

- Generally speaking, you only want to contact your own legislator on issues or bills, as legislators are most likely to respond to their own constituents who elect them. (Exception: It is OK to contact all committee members when the committee is hearing or voting on a bill of interest to you.)
- The Texas House of Representatives "Who Represents Me" website provides House, Senate, and congressional representative information.
- Remember to contact statewide elected officeholders, such as the governor and lieutenant governor when appropriate.

### Making Contact via Phone

- Be prepared – have brief notes outlining the bill number, your position on the bill, and the rationale behind your position.
- If you can't speak with the legislator, ask to talk with the staff member who covers education-related issues.
- Tell your legislator or the staff person how you would like them to vote on the matter.
- Provide your contact information if appropriate.
- Be professional and courteous.

### Writing Emails or Letters

- Briefly introduce yourself and include the bill number with your position and rationale.
- Check for correct spelling, grammar, punctuation and tone.
- Provide your contact information in case a resource is needed on the topic at hand or in the future on other education issues.
- Be professional and courteous.

## Making Personal Visits

- If possible, preschedule an appointment with the legislator or appropriate staff.
- Plan on limiting the meeting to 30 minutes (and likely less during a legislative session).
- Dress professionally.
- Prepare materials to use as “leave behinds” (one-pagers preferred).
- Follow up with a thank you, which will also serve as a reminder of the personal visit.

## Providing Public Testimony

- Dress professionally.
- Be brief – often public testimony is strictly limited to 2-3 minutes.
- Speak clearly and don’t read your testimony.
- State your name and position on the bill at the beginning of your testimony.
- Thank the committee for the opportunity to provide input.
- Offer to serve as a resource or answer any questions.

## General Do’s and Don’ts When Engaging Legislators & Staff

### Do’s

- Be professional and courteous to all.
- If you don’t know the answer, tell them you will find the answer and follow up with them.
- Offer to serve as a resource on education issues: school finance, assessment and accountability, etc.
- Be brief: “Make it fit on a bumper sticker.”
- Stay engaged – build and nurture relationships.

### Don’ts

- Don’t be disrespectful.
- Don’t answer if you don’t know – credibility is key.
- Don’t overload staff or members with information; be concise
- Don’t wait for the regular session to start building relationships – start today!
- Don’t assume they know school business.

## Useful Information to Have on Hand

- Annual budget of your district
- Fund balance (designated vs. undesignated)
- Tax rate (M&O and I&S), local debt, LHE
- Student population and demographic information

