
WISCONSIN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

Affiliated with the National Education Association

*Great Schools
benefit
Everyone!*

Great Schools Need Great Member Lobbyists

Becoming an effective member lobbyist is as easy as 1-2-3

Step 1: Getting started

Great schools are built by grassroots, member lobbyists. Only you can relate the day-to-day experiences in our schools that result from education policies set at the Capitol. The stories you tell lawmakers about the effects their education policies have in their districts—good or bad—get their attention. Help build and maintain great schools by becoming an effective member lobbyist.

To get started, you may need to learn exactly who represents you, or you may need to know an address or telephone number, or you may need to know background on a specific issue.



By visiting www.weac.org you can contact your legislators. Click on the icon to send an e-mail to your legislators about the latest, breaking education issues facing the Wisconsin Legislature or U.S. Congress.

Step 2: The message

- **Keep it simple:** Legislators want to know the specifics—if there is legislation on the issue, they want the bill number. Legislators want to know why they should care and how it affects their district and their constituents—the real-life, day-to-day impact. Legislators want to know what you want them to do—support or oppose the bill.
- **Know your stuff:** *Research your issue and have your facts straight—winging it can ultimately hurt your best efforts. If you can't answer a question, don't. You can always find the answer and follow up—a second contact is a great time to make your case again.*
- **Identify yourself:** Make sure legislators know your full name and address, that you are their constituent, or that you teach their constituents.
- **Respect:** Legislators are just like the rest of us: They do not react well to threats, rude behavior or whining. If your legislator doesn't agree with you this time, express your disappointment and look for areas where you can find agreement on education policies.

Step 3: Contact

There are a number of ways to deliver your message—in person, by telephone, by mail or e-mail, or at a legislative hearing. No matter the method, there are several hard and fast rules:

- Always identify yourself. Give your full name, title and address.
- Always use the correct title and full name for the legislators—Senator, Representative, Congressman, Congresswoman or Governor—and double check the spelling of their names. (Even if you are personal friends, use the proper title in a formal setting.)

Mary Bell, President
Dan Burkhalter, Executive Director



Contact in person or on the phone

Face-to-face contact is the most effective form of communication and one-on-one contact over the telephone is a close second.

- Capitol office: You may be able to visit with the legislator or reach a legislator on the telephone during the week at his or her Capitol office. For a meeting, it is best to call ahead and set a time for your visit because walk-ins often walk out without seeing anyone but a staff member.
- District office: You may also be able to visit or reach a legislator by telephone in the district on weekends and when the Legislature is not in session. Most legislators hold monthly public meetings in their own districts—find out when your legislator’s district meetings are held.
- Be punctual—Be on time for your appointment, but don’t expect the same from your legislator.
- Be patient—Sometimes committee meetings, floor votes or other commitments run overtime and your legislator can’t leave.
- Say thank you—Follow-up with a short note, thanking the legislator for the time and repeating your message.

Contact by mail or e-mail

Letters and e-mail messages can make a big difference, too. If elected officials receive two or three messages about an issue they take it very seriously. WEAC encourages members to use their home e-mail.

- Keep it short: Focus your message on one or two of the most pertinent points and keep your message to one page. Make sure your message relates to the action you want the legislator to take—support, oppose, amend.
- Proofread: Before you seal the envelope or hit the “send” button, check your message for spelling and grammar.
- Format: Make sure you use the proper form on the letter and the envelope (and send it first class):

The Honorable John Doe
Wisconsin State Senate (or Assembly)
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Testimony at a public hearing

Every bill gets routed to a committee. Some bills get a public hearing before the committee, and the public has an opportunity to voice its opinion. If you want to speak to a committee on a particular bill, ask the committee’s staff to send you the committee’s agenda and notify you when you can testify.

- Written statement: Prepare a written statement for distribution to committee members. It should contain your name and address, your position, and the outcome you want from the committee.
- Public hearing process: When you arrive at the public hearing, check with the Capitol staff or the committee clerk and sign in, indicating you wish to speak on a specific bill. Provide the staff with copies of your written statement and wait for the committee chair to call on you to testify.
- Call ahead: Things change on a daily basis at the Capitol, so call one last time to make sure everything is on schedule. You may save yourself a trip.
- Don’t read your statement: When it’s your turn to testify at the public hearing, state your name and city or town or school district. Make eye contact while you make your point—don’t simply read your statement. Expect questions. If you do not know the answer, say so.

Building great schools is all about building good relationships with elected officials. Great schools need great member lobbyists who keep the issues before their legislators, give the issues a local flavor, and follow up with their legislators, especially when they deserve a thank you for a good vote.

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