Legislative Education Day

March 5-6, 2017 • State Capitol • Salem, Oregon

Communicating with elected representatives

On Legislative Education Day (LED), you will be meeting and talking to legislators and other elected representatives. These representatives will have little or no knowledge of the work you do or the important role you have in making our K-12 schools, community colleges, park and recreation districts, education service districts (ESDs), Head Starts and libraries work. The following tips will help you be successful on LED in communicating our message and perspective.

What is the message and perspective that we communicate on LED? The answer is quite simple. OSEA members *have information and knowledge that elected representatives do not have*. Our members know what level of service is being provided at their workplace with the resources available. They know what is being done well and can identify areas where additional resources are needed to continue or improve the job being done. Each legislator needs to know that kind of information. Legislators also need to hear from us about legislation that may impact public education or other important public services.

Remember, all elected representatives, whether it is the president of the United States or a local school board member, have limited knowledge about many of the issues on which they are asked to make decisions. *Every elected representative depends on people like you to communicate useful information that will help them make good decisions.*

Think about the following tips when visiting in person:

- When scheduling the appointment, tell the representative or staff person the purpose of the meeting and the number of people who will be attending; small groups are good. Remember — those who work closely with that representative can be great allies!
- You have a limited amount of time to communicate your major points, so decide who is going to say what and practice those roles.
- Arrive early. Get familiar with your surroundings and chat with the staff if it seems welcome.
- The meeting:
    - Introduce yourself and, if you are a constituent, say so;

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- Appropriately address the legislator as “Senator” or “Representative”;
- Choose a spokesperson to briefly explain the purpose of the visit, whether it is for a specific reason or informational;
- Balance your presentation with factual information and personal stories. If possible, offer a testimonial from someone in the group who is directly affected by the presented issue;
- Describe both the local and statewide impact of the issue whenever possible;
- Show, through your input in the conversation, that you are aware of the opposing position;
- Be courteous and do not argue;
- If you do not know the answer to a question, do not bluff. Offer to find out the answer and get back to that person, then be sure to follow up;
- Leave the legislator with a summary or fact sheet; and
- Thank everyone, including staff, for their time.

- Follow up the meeting with a “thank you” note. You may also want to include a local/chapter newsletter that discusses the meeting and any other pertinent information.

The Ten Commandments of any communication with legislators:

1. Be proud. You are an expert and have information to give.

2. Arrive at the appointment early.

3. Tell the truth.

4. Keep it simple.

5. Be courteous and gracious.

6. Be firm but polite in disagreement.

7. Know your opponents and be gracious when discussing their motives.

8. Admit it if you don’t know the answer; don’t bluff.

9. Say thank you to everyone!

10. Follow up with a thank you note and any requested information.