

Take A Legislator to School The Illinois Education Association

Every decision that impacts your work is a political one. To make informed decisions, elected officials need to learn what's going on in our classrooms and in our school buildings. Just as importantly, they need to hear from you, about what it takes to make your school great. An excellent way to help them learn is a school visit.

To help you make sure your site visit is successful; we put together the following checklist:

1) Decide who you will invite and what your message will be: We recommend you invite the State Senator, State Representative or Member of Congress that represents your area. Then decide what it is you want the elected official to learn from the visit. Consider the legislator's interest as you plan your visit. *Is it the impact of declining resources? The lack of funding for special education? The number of kids in the classroom?* You should use the message(s) as a guide for the rest of your planning.

2) Contact IEA for additional assistance: When you decide to host a site visit, contact your IEA Government Relations Specialist:
Jim Reed, Gaye Harper-Larison, Janette Weatherall, Michelle Ishmael, Brian Rous or Will Lovett at 800/252-8076.

3) Determine the role of the administration and students: At a minimum, you will need to work with the administration on the details of the visit. But the administration can play a bigger role, especially if you believe it can be helpful in getting your message across. Also, get students involved! *There is nothing more powerful than kids talking about what it takes to make their school great.*

4) Decide the locations, timing and content of the visit: It's nice to show off brand-new schools, but don't forget to also show the schools that have great needs. Consider a time when staff will have an opportunity to meet with the legislator. We have attached some different ideas to help you. Your IEA government relations staff will have some ideas of the legislator's interests.

5) Invite and then confirm: To invite an elected official, call his or her office, talk to the staff and then do a follow-up letter (see attached sample letter). It is very important you remain in contact with the office as you continue to plan. Keep confirming details and, if possible, keep sending confirmation letters.

6) Pick a host and put your plan into action: An association member should be selected to serve as the School Visit host. The host should greet and stay with the legislator throughout the visit. They could have breakfast or lunch together prior to the tour to get to know each other and talk about the visit. Then put your plan into action!

7) Write a story: An association member should prepare a quick story with the highlights of the visit. This would be a good story for your association or region newsletter.

8) Take a picture: You could arrange for a member to take photos throughout the day. Send the picture to the legislator along with your thank you note.

9) Take notes and report back to the IEA Government Relations staff: Jot down any discussion on issues or legislation. It would be helpful to IEA's lobbying efforts to be fully briefed on the site visit.

10) Don't forget to say "thank you": It is important for the long-term relationship with the legislator that you send a thank you note for their time. We suggest you include with the thank you note copies of any news articles, pictures or association newsletters that highlighted the visit.

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Ideas for School Visits:

- **You may want to organize the school visit around the beginning or end of the day when staff have the opportunity to meet with the legislator as a group.**
- **Host a coffee with the staff before the kids arrive, lunch with staff in the lounge, or an after-school listening session after the kids leave.**
- **Consider having the legislator ride the morning or afternoon school bus route.**
- **Have a custodian give a school tour "outside the classroom".**
- **Invite the legislator to spend the entire school day shadowing you.**

As for the content of the visit, have the activities match the message you are trying to communicate.

Don't be afraid to think "outside the box" - have the legislator visit a math class rather than a government class.

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SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER

Date

The Honorable (name)

Address

Dear Representative/Senator (name):

The faculty and staff of the _____ School District would like to invite you to visit our school. This will be a great opportunity for you to observe first-hand the many wonderful things going on in our schools along with the many challenges we face as we work to make sure every kid has a great school.

We recently talked with your staff about your availability for a visit. We were told that you should be available on (fill in the date and time - Friday, September 14, in the afternoon, for example).

The purpose of the school visit is (message). We will also be hosting an informal reception in your honor (prior to)(after your) visit. The school visit should take no more than a (few) hours.

We look forward to your visit and we will be more than happy to coordinate all the arrangements with your office. We will be contacting your office again soon. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to call (one person's name) at (telephone number) with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Signed by local association president/member(s)