

TIPS ON MEETING WITH YOUR MPP

- Politicians are busy people, so try to schedule the meeting well in advance.
- Provide specific information about the topic you wish to raise with the MPP in order to allow the MPP to be as informed as possible about the issue. Consider sending some information about the issue in advance of the meeting date.
- Request a specific amount of time for the meeting i.e. 30 minutes, 40 minutes etc. Be sure to confirm the amount of time allocated for the meeting so that you can prepare your presentation and allow some time for discussion. Keep the discussion within the time you have agreed upon.
- Plan carefully with respect to who should form part of your delegation. Is it important, for instance, to have all of the affiliates represented? Are there other groups or individuals who should be represented in order to impress upon the MPP the extent to which the issue is a concern in his or her constituency?
- Make sure the MPP is advised about who will be in attendance from your side prior to the meeting.
- Be clear in your own mind about what you wish to accomplish at the meeting.
- Attempt to get a clear understanding of the MPP's position on your issue, and, if it's supportive, ask what actions he or she is willing to take.
- Leave behind with the MPP a brief or a written outline of your concern and your proposed action.
- Send a letter outlining your understanding of any commitment made during the meeting and thanking the MPP for the meeting.
- Provide a brief report on the nature and outcome of the meeting to the staff person responsible for political action at your Provincial Office.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting and keep a record of the meeting on file for reference in the event of future political action on the issue.



TIPS FOR WRITING TO MPPs

- Do not use form letters.
- A typed letter is not always preferable. However, if you send a hand-written letter, make sure it is legible.
- Keep letters short and concise.
- Include a complete return address on the envelope and in the letter so that the MPP can respond.
- Identify the issue you are addressing clearly in the first paragraph. If you are writing about a particular piece of legislation, refer to the title and number of the bill.
- Do not assume the MPP is as informed as you are about a particular subject. As legislators they deal with a countless number of issues on a daily basis.
- Provide rationale for your position. If you are drawing from personal or professional experience, share that with your MPP.
- Be constructive. Acknowledge the broader political context in which the MPP and the government is working. Present rationale and solutions as they relate to the broad public interest.
- If you are aware of personal contacts of the MPP who would be willing to support your position, solicit their help.
- Limit your letter to one issue.
- Be reasonable. Do not ask for the impossible.
- Request a reply from your MPP outlining his/her views on the issue you have raised and the actions he/she intends to take.
- Follow-up any action by the MPP with a reply, expressing appreciation or concern, depending on the response.
- Provide a copy of your letter and the MPP's response to Provincial Office.

Adapted from material prepared by the Council for Exceptional Children



ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' FEDERATION



HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE SPOKESPERSON

■ BE PREPARED

Find out about your audience: who will be there, how many, how old they are, educational background and special interests.

■ PERSONALIZE YOUR MESSAGE

Make sure you address the group's concerns at the same time you make them aware of yours.

■ WRITE OUT YOUR SPEECH

Follow the basic rule of speech making. Tell people what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you told them. Have visual reinforcements when appropriate. Cartoons, drawings and charts help tell the story.

■ TALK - DON'T SPEAK

Aim to be understood, not to impress. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Use statistics sparingly. Be generous with anecdotes and examples.

■ BE CLEAR

Have a clear message and call to action. Stick to **three key points**. Tell them why what you say is important and what it is exactly that you want them to do.

■ BE BRIEF

Don't go over your allotted time. Better to leave people wanting more than wanting to get rid of you.

■ DISTRIBUTE HAND-OUTS AFTER YOUR REMARKS

Otherwise, some in your audience will spend their time leafing through the hand-out instead of listening to you.

■ PREPARE FOR QUESTIONS

Think about the questions people might ask and how you might answer before you give your presentation. Practice your answers, especially to questions that might be difficult.

■ REMEMBER TO SAY THANK YOU

Thank the group for giving you the opportunity to speak to them.



HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE LETTER

- Write on personal, school or Teacher-Librarian Association letterhead. If possible, type your letter. If you hand write your letter, make sure your writing is legible.
- Identify yourself. I'm a "XXX" who....
- Explain your relationship to the issue: I am a teacher-librarian or teacher or parent or school administrator.
- Be brief. Limit yourself to one or two pages, no longer.
- Focus on one issue per letter. You lose your impact if your try to address several issues at once.
- Be sure to include your name, address and phone number. Often, envelopes are separated from the letter. Make sure your address and phone number are on your letter.
- Give reasons for your point of view. Personal experience is always best. Tell how it affects you personally; why you feel the way you do.
- Be reasonable. Councillors and MPPs are human too. Don't ask for the impossible.
- Be specific about what you want. 'We are concerned about School Boards replacing teacher-librarians with individuals who do not have teacher qualifications.'
- Don't send a form letter. Form letters look like they're part of an organized pressure campaign and don't have as much impact as a personal letter.
- Always say thank you. Very few people remember to say thank you. When your trustees or MPPs do something right don't be shy about letting them know that you think they are doing a good job.

Sample letter by a classroom teacher

Dear _____

We are writing to express our concern that the position of the teacher-librarian may be eliminated. As classroom teachers we rely upon the knowledge and expertise of the teacher-librarians in our school to support the courses we teach. Teacher-librarians have worked with us to develop curriculum and implement resource-based learning which have become important components of the courses we teach.

For example, in our grade 11 advanced parenting classes we have introduced a unit which provides the students with an opportunity to read young adult fiction and to research a social issue. We rely on the teacher-librarian's knowledge of young adult fiction to select novels for this assignment. The teacher-librarian also participates in the evaluation of the unit. The teacher-librarian marks the essay and the presentation, and these marks are included in the students' evaluation.

In another course we have developed a collaborative unit which asks the students to prepare a scrapbook of current newspaper and magazine articles about a social issue. The students read the articles and develop two pertinent questions about the article which forms the basis for a research project. The teacher-librarian instructs in the use of new technology and varied sources - CD-ROM, Internet as well as print, and participates in the assesement and evaluation.

Both the classroom teachers and students would notice a difference without the teacher-librarians in our school. Many of the students come to realize that they can use the teacher-librarian's expertise when it comes to choosing resources, locating and using information and writing a thesis statement.

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TEN BASIC RULES FOR MEETING YOUR MPP

1. FIRST THINGS FIRST

Don't be upset if in contacting a politician to set up a meeting, you are screened by a staff member first to find out as much as possible on your subject.

Be forthright with the politician's staff and be prepared to put in writing what the purpose of your meeting with the politician will be. Politicians hate surprises.

2. YOUR DEADLINE FOR THE MEETING IS IRRELEVANT

Make your contact early enough so that your date and the MPP's 'earliest convenience' can be around the same time.

Don't be overly aggressive or demanding, or you may wait longer.

Remember that the politician has homework to do, which will take time.

3. THEIR TIME IS NOT YOUR TIME

Find out what the politician knows, then use the time you have with him/her to help him with things he doesn't know.

If you assume the politician knows nothing, that's an insult. Plus you waste time going over old ground.

4. THE WHOLE CROWD IS NOT REQUIRED

Keep your group small. There's no strength in numbers, just annoyance.

5. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Prepare well ahead of time and know who is going to say what.

6. NO WALLPAPER

The fewer pieces of paper the better. The politician will not have time to read a lot of paper, and these days there is a real sensitivity to saving trees.

7. POLITICIANS CAN READ

Leave written information behind, don't read it to the politician. This is insulting.

Use time to stress the most important points.

8. 20 QUESTIONS

Leave lots of time for questions; that is the most valuable part of your time together.

9. NOT DONE YET

Don't leave without asking to whom else you should be talking. Make sure you see them, too.

10. THE ANSWER WILL BE 'NO ANSWER'

At the point of being lobbied, no politician in his right mind would make a commitment on the spot.

The best you can do is say: "And we hope to hear from you soon?"

If the answer is "yes", the politician will contact you; if "no", it will be his staff.

If you get no answer from the politician, go to his constituency office or leave a message on his home telephone answering machine.

(Originally entitled '10 Basic Rules for Lobbying' from a workshop given by the Honourable Ralph Klein before he was elected Premier of Alberta. Courtesy of Pat Cavill Consulting, Calgary)



HANDLING HOSTILE QUESTIONS

LISTEN

Really listen. Suspend all judgement of the individual and identify the issue.

EMPATHIZE

After a brief pause to show you've given the question serious consideration, respond with positive words. For example, 'You evidently have strong feelings about this.' or 'I respect your views, but let me give you another perspective.'

REFRAME THE QUESTION

If you're asked "Why can't a non-teacher do your job?", don't respond negatively. Use the occasion to strip away loaded words by saying, "Perhaps we need to clarify what we consider are the important aspects of our job."

BE POSITIVE, HONEST AND STRAIGHTFORWARD

Use facts, not conjecture. Make sure to get your positive statement up front, even if you've been asked a negative question. Tell the truth. If you don't know an answer, tell your interviewer that you will get back with the answer or direct him/her to the appropriate person.

DON'T ASSUME ANYTHING YOU SAY IS 'OFF THE RECORD'

Remember, these are public -- not private -- conversations. Everything you say represents the the School Library Information Centre and the School. Anything you say is "on the record" and may be repeated at some point. This is especially important to keep in mind when dealing with the media.

PRACTICE

If you know you'll be facing hostile questions, role play beforehand with a colleague. Practice answering the worst, most difficult questions you can imagine.

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