



## **Meeting With Your Legislator**

Meeting with your legislators is one way of communicating with them. A personal visit may be made either at the Capitol office or at a legislator's district office. Several steps are outlined below that you may wish to follow in preparing to meet with your legislator.

### **Before the Visit**

Meet with other board members, district staff and the public to discuss your ideas and be aware of community response and interest. Note opposing viewpoints and constituencies, and be prepared to respond to these concerns if raised by your legislators.

Call or write your legislator for an appointment. If you plan to see him/her in the Capitol office, call shortly before you leave to confirm the appointment. Occasionally, hearings or other meetings occur that demand their presence elsewhere at the time of your meeting.

Give your legislator an "issues packet" during your visit. The purpose of the packet is to provide a point of reference to focus discussion, and to reinforce some of the matters discussed after you have left.

You may wish to supplement this material with local information and facts that reinforce the CSBA issues being raised. For example, in the past, members of the Marin County School Boards Association were known for providing their legislative representatives with a packet that includes a brief narrative summary of the general concepts they wished to discuss at their meeting and objectives they sought to accomplish. The narrative was followed by a detailed description of the financial status of their districts.



Besides a philosophical discussion of their positions, the Marin County School Boards Association includes specific data to support their points. Most importantly, they provide detailed information about their districts. Although legislators are often provided with information regarding the statewide effect of their decisions, they rarely have available information on the specific school districts they represent. If you provide that information, you will have a greater chance of influencing decisions.

The association also included articles which supported their positions. Even if your legislator has previously read the article, it reinforces that the press and the community are aware of the problem, and that is something your legislator should consider important and work with you to resolve.

Be sure to include names of contact people (and/or business cards) in your packet so the legislator or his/her staff can contact you for further information.

If you prepare such a packet before meeting with your legislators, your discussion is more likely to be focused on the issues you wish to discuss. The legislator will also see you as a valuable information source who may be relied upon in the future.

### **During the Visit**

Have confidence in yourself. You, too, are an elected official and have local support. Do not let the fear of visiting a state legislator intimidate you. If you or your district staff have expert knowledge, share it with your representative. If you or a district staff person have a strong background on a subject (i.e. your business manager's understanding of your district's financial problems), share this background with your legislator. A conscientious legislator welcomes advice and counsel.



After a summary introduction, note your purpose and objective for the meeting. Be as concise as possible. Depending on the time you meet with the legislator, he/she may be on a limited time schedule and time may be of the essence.

Don't insist on a commitment before your legislator has considered all the facts. A legislator has various considerations, such as other constituencies, other provisions of the bill, future amendments, etc., to weigh before making a commitment. Also, do not be carried away by a friendly reception and interpret this reception as support for your position without having heard this support stated.