

ADVOCATE AND STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS

How to Communicate with Elected Officials About Matters of Gifted Education in Missouri

Democracy is not convenient, or easy. But, people who are elected to positions in local and state government listen to their constituents and care about constituent opinions. It is our right as citizens to lobby, or to stand up for or against issues that affect us, and all gifted students in Missouri. But to be effective, you must communicate properly with your representative and senators, and other elected officials. Here are some guidelines of how to do so effectively.

All Communications Should Be:

* **CLEAR** *

* **CONCISE** *

* **CONSISTENT** *

Remember: YOU are the expert!

- Members and staff do not have time to understand every issue and detail.
- *You* know what is happening with gifted kids in your classrooms, schools, homes, and programs...*They* rely on constituents and others to help educate them.
- They want to hear your input and personal experience.
- Invite legislators, elected officials and candidates to your schools and classrooms.

Written Communications

Here are some other key points to remember in writing to your legislators:

- Be courteous and respectful in all communications. Don't use threats.
- Do your homework on who you are writing to. Check their websites and express knowledge and interest in them.
- Know your issue! Educate yourself! Check your facts. Never make up an answer.
- It is helpful to share how your personal story fits in the broader/general issue, but do make it personal and talk about how the issue affects you. Communicate the value of your programming, and the unique opportunities it provides.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and/or as an expert in gifted education, a teacher, a parent, a gifted student, etc.
- Identify the subject in the first paragraph. If you are writing in reference to a particular bill, refer to the measure's House or Senate bill number and/or title (i.e. HB 761), if possible.
- Keep your comments brief, pertinent, and factual. Decide on your message. Cover only one issue per letter.
- Limit your comments to one page or two at most.
- Put any prepared message(s) in your own words. Avoid stereotyped phrases, jargon, and sentences that give the appearance of form letters.
- Check your work. Spell names correctly. Be neat. Address them by title ("Dear Senator," "Dear Representative," "Dear Governor," etc.)



Also, don't forget that elected officials are people too, and they like to be told when they've done something right. Send them a congratulatory note or a thank you note when they do something that merits approval. Give them credit where credit is due! A little gratitude and appreciation can go a long way...

Here's an outline to follow when writing a letter to your elected official.

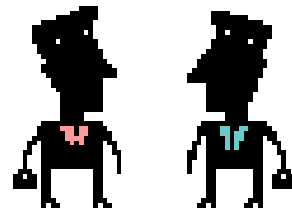
- Introductory Paragraph ... Give a reason for your letter, stating the title and number of the existing or pending legislation, if appropriate. ... Identify yourself and your interest in gifted education.
 - State the action you are seeking. Communicate reasons why this legislator should act in support of your bill. These reasons might include historical facts, logic, data, credible opinion, personal experience, and the weaknesses of opposing points of view.
 - Letter Closing ... Restate the action you are seeking. Ask for the official's comment. ... Express appreciation for considering your views. Indicate willingness to help. ... If you can arrange it, invite the official to visit your classroom or school. Provide your address and phone number.



The Best Communication: A Personal Visit

The most effective way of communicating with a legislator is to personally meet with them or their staff.

- Do your homework
- Find their schedule (website, Facebook, Twitter)
- Introduce yourself
- Meet your legislator at home during the off session
- Offer to serve as a resource for education, specifically gifted education
- Present business card or contact information
- Follow-up note - thank you, reminder of issue, express interest in meeting again.



It is very important to remember that all contacts with elected officials must be constructive even if their opinions contrast with your own or those of your organization. It's one thing to disagree with someone, it's another thing to be a jerk about it . . . be respectful, courteous, and professional. And don't lobby your cause at inappropriate times. They are elected officials, but they have personal lives, too!

Telephone Calls

If this is your first call to a legislator's office, you'll talk with a staff member. The first thing you need to do is state your name and the fact that you are a constituent of the legislator. Then briefly state the nature of your call, i.e., urging the legislator to support or oppose a particular piece of legislation:



"Hello, my name is Sally Smith and I am a constituent of (name of senator or representative or other elected official). I am calling today to urge them to support/oppose HR 1234. Thank you."

These types of calls are very important to legislators and the vast majority of offices keep record of calls.

Some Information That May Be Helpful:

With continuing social, technological, economic, and other issues facing the nation, there is an ever-growing need for intelligent, creative, capable leaders and thinkers. However, there is abundant evidence that the "most able" students in Missouri (and in the U.S. at large) are not being supported, and prepared for their vital role in our state's and our nation's future. Our brightest students are failing to reach their potential.



Talking Points:

According to the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC):

- According to 2018 data from the internationally recognized "Programme for International Student Assessment" (PISA) exams, students who took the test scored just slightly higher in reading than students in peer nations, but slightly below peer nation students in mathematics. At best, U.S. students are average performers.
- Research following recent education legislation shows lowest performing students have made learning improvements while the nation's highest performing students have made almost no learning gains.
- Majority of teachers agree that "too often, the brightest students are bored and under-challenged in school; we're not giving them a sufficient chance to thrive."
- Majority of teachers agree that "getting underachieving students to reach proficiency has become so important that the needs of advanced students take a back seat."
- Only 10% of teachers report that advanced students are likely to be taught with curriculum and instruction specially designed for their abilities (compared to 51% who report struggling learners receive such curriculum).
- While 50% of high school teachers say that honors and accelerated classes in their schools are "truly rigorous and challenging," 40% say that they're too often "watered down and lacking rigor."

Say THANK YOU, to our Governor, our Senators and Representatives, our Missouri University and College leaders, local school boards, counselors, administrators, teachers, parent groups, civic and community groups! SPREAD THE WORD!