

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:

The North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA)



Many of the policy changes needed to meet student needs are at the level of the state legislature — the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA).

It's essential that constituents tell legislators about needs in their school district.

Some possible means of engagement:

- ♦ writing a letter or postcard
- ♦ meeting one-on-one (in person or virtual)
- ♦ group actions (demonstrations, etc.)

THE RIGHT ACTION at the RIGHT TIME

Voicing a concern to your representatives can be done anytime; however, if you want to share your opinion on legislation being considered, pay close attention to the NCGA calendar.

For groups, you might support the introduction of a new bill or protest a bill that's coming up for vote. A group event might need to come together at the last minute since it's not uncommon for the NCGA to call special sessions at unpredictable times.

ADVOCACY TIMELINE for NCGA SESSIONS



COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Legislators meet to discuss the contents of a bill and consider its consequences. Advocates can keep track of committee meetings to see what's going to be discussed.



**SIGN UP for
EMAIL ALERTS**
www.ncleg.gov

follow relevant House and Senate committees such as:
Education Appropriations
Education Oversight



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WRITING a LETTER to your LEGISLATORS

Always feel free to contact your own representatives to express concerns on any topic.

It's their job to listen.

When a particular bill is being considered in committee, you can write to members of the relevant committee (e.g. *the House Standing Committee on Education*).

It rarely pays off to blanket the entire NCGA with letters, since legislators often disregard input if it's not from their constituents.



BE POLITE. Personal attacks, accusations of dishonesty, malfeasance, or poor intentions aren't likely to foster consideration and cooperation. It's appropriate to express frustration at a legislator's words or actions, or to set the record straight if a legislator makes a false statement, but please do so calmly.

SUGGESTIONS

Introduce yourself and state why you are writing

"My name is _____ and I am your constituent from _____, North Carolina". or "I am writing to you because you are a member of the _____ Committee and this issue is important to your work".

State your issue or your "ASK"

- Bring their attention to an issue and ask them to help. Concerns can range from a broad issue like the state education budget, down to the delivery of a specific service for your child.
- Ask a legislator to support/vote against a particular bill, with specific reference to the bill number.

Tell your story

Explain briefly why this issue is important to you, and perhaps share a story of your experience related to schools.
Be authentic — your voice matters.

FOLLOW UP

- If you **DON'T** receive a response from your legislator within a week or so, follow up with a telephone call.
- If you **DO** receive a response, thank them for their reply and ask (if it's not clear already) if they will assist you. You may also push back on any claims/arguments the legislator may make against your position.



Hosting a "POSTCARD PARTY"

- a fun way to socialize and expand the reach of your advocacy

PLAN YOUR CAMPAIGN:

- Define the issue you want the elected official to know about
- Plan a script for what to write, or have people craft their own message.

INVITATIONS: take advantage of Facebook groups for your neighborhood, schools, PTA, or other education advocacy groups.

DATE & TIME:

- determine whether day or evening is best
- a good format is a 1-hour event where people can drop in anytime to fill out cards.
- make it kid-friendly and have them join in!

VENUE: private homes, neighborhood clubhouses, or library conference rooms.



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LEGISLATOR ADDRESSES:

Senate: <https://ncleg.gov/Members/ContactInfo/S>

House of Representatives: <https://ncleg.gov/Members/ContactInfo/H>

OPTIONS for CARDS:

purchase pre-metered post cards from the post-office	buy stamps ahead of time to place on 4 x 6 index cards	take finished cards to the post office and get postage
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- Print mailing address labels or have people address cards by hand.
- Provide a supply of pens, markers, or colored pencils.
- Some groups ask for donations to pay for stamps and cards.

If you're using index cards, provide an example of how to properly address a post card: www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Postcard

SCHEDULING a MEETING with your LEGISLATORS

1. **Decide on a meeting location:**
 - NCGA offices, Raleigh
 - Your district
 - Virtual meeting online

2. **Submit a request via email:**

Get addresses for your legislator(s):
www.ncleg.gov



SAMPLE

Dear [Representative/Senator] [Last Name of Legislator],

I am a constituent who lives in [town/community]. I would like to schedule a meeting [name location: Raleigh, within the district, or online with a virtual meeting service].

[Your specific concern] is a critical issue for North Carolina's public schools. I would like to talk with [Representative/Senator] [Last Name of Legislator] about specific solutions, etc.

I will be following up on this request with a phone call to your office. Thank you for your consideration.

FOLLOW UP: If you don't receive a return message within two days, call the legislative staff.

3. **After the meeting:**

Promptly send a thank you note via email or post, with a summary of the discussion and your request for support. You may share your meeting details with Every Child NC (email: info@everychildnc.org).



Legislators have limited availability so make the most of the time.

North Carolina's legislators only serve part-time and travel back to their home districts. They are genuinely busy, have limited time, and often have only one person on staff.

Note when the NCGA is in session, as members will be in Raleigh for much of the week. Further, Tues.-Thur. is the busiest time for staff during session, so look for the best days to reach them.

Session generally runs from February through early July in odd-numbered years, and from mid-April through early July in even-numbered years, though committee meetings and special sessions may happen throughout the year.

Tips for hosting a virtual meeting

Many legislators began conducting virtual meetings with constituents due to COVID-19.

We predict that online meetings will continue due to their advantage in convenience and eliminating travel.



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- ◆ **Pick a Platform.** Zoom is a widely used video communication platform, but other options include Google Meet and Facebook Messenger. If you're new to video conference applications, download a version and familiarize yourself with it.
- ◆ **Request a meeting.** Send a meeting request to the legislator's office via email (see above) and ask if your proposed platform is acceptable.
- ◆ **Create a meeting link.** Once the platform is confirmed and a time is agreed upon, create the conference link and send it to the legislator's office. If necessary, follow up with a phone call to make sure they received the link.
- ◆ **Prepare.** Your argument will be more successful if you carefully plan ahead and have an outline of talking points. You may only be given only a limited amount of time (i.e. 10- 15 minutes).
- ◆ **Use video camera.** Leave your computer camera on to take advantage of the face-to-face opportunity that's been given to you.
- ◆ **Be respectful of time limitations.** Open the meeting at least ten minutes early so you will be online when the legislator joins.