

Calling your Legislator

The effect of the phone call is similar to that of letter writing. As with all grassroots advocacy, your call is most likely to receive attention if you have developed a personal relationship with the legislator or staffer. Often, calls are “logged” as for or against a particular issue. Sometimes, you may not get past the receptionist or intern. Nonetheless, making a well-timed call can be particularly important. And, especially when combined with calls from your colleagues on the same issue, the call may tip the balance in your favor. So, don’t hesitate to call.

The easiest way to reach your Senator or Representative is to call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard: (202) 224-3121. You can also find the direct number to any member's office by consulting the [Senate phone list](#), the [House phone list](#) or the [Illinois General Assembly](#) site.

The easiest way to contact your State Senator or State Representative is to use the [Illinois General Assembly site](#) to find his/ her Springfield or district office number.

Whether you’re calling a member of Congress or your state-level elected officials, some guidelines remain the same.

For Whom Should You Ask?

- Ask for the senator or representative if you know them personally.
- If you don’t know the senator or representative, ask to speak with the legislative assistant who handles your issue. For most issues, that probably will be the legislative assistant who handles education issues.
- If you can’t reach a legislative assistant, leave a concise message. Legislative offices do count the number of calls they receive on an issue — pro and con — and relay that information to the senator or representative.

Tips for Making Effective Phone Calls

- Focus on a single issue, making two or three key points in your phone call.
- Have talking points — or your own notes — in front of you when you call to stay focused on the message you want to deliver.
- Make the issue local -- localize the issue to demonstrate the impact on the legislator’s own constituents.
- Clearly state the action you wish the senator or representative to take on the issue (vote for, vote against, offer an amendment, delete a provision, etc.).
- Keep your call brief — not more than three or four minutes.
- Don’t bluff if you are asked a question you can’t answer. Tell them you’ll get the answer and get back to them.
- Leave your name and telephone number with the staff to whom you’ve spoken in case they have any questions later.
- Jot down the name of the legislative assistant you spoke to and put it in your phone book. Next time, you can ask for him or her by name and begin building a relationship. Staffers are more likely to listen to and return phone calls from people they know.
- Send a thank you note. ([See Sample Thank You Letter](#))

Sample Phone Conversation

Staff Member: Thank you for calling Representative **(Name)**'s office. How may I help you?

Caller: Hello, my name is **(your name)** from **(City and State)**, and I am calling on behalf of **(your community school/organization)** and the Federation for Community Schools.

Staff Member: Wonderful, what can I do for you?

Caller: As a constituent of Representative **(Names)**'s district, **(Insert information on why you support community schools, or any specific legislation you support specific to our work. Include why this subject is of concern to the Representative's constituents)** Remember, be brief!

Staff Member: Thank you for sharing your concerns with us, and I will relay your comments on to the member of Congress.

Caller: Thank you for this information. I appreciate you sharing my thoughts on community schools. Have a great day.

Tips for Telling your Community Schools' Story

- Include numbers – how many students does your community school serve? How many families? How many people does your community school employ beyond classroom/ school-day staff?
 - Include results – has attendance increased at your school? Have academic outcomes improved? Have disciplinary rates decreased? Has parent engagement increased, and/ or has school climate improve? IL's state school report cards can provide information you can use, <http://illinoisreportcard.com>, as can your 21st CCLC evaluations and those for other funders
 - Include a personal story – share how your community school has had a positive impact on an individual student or family.
 - Keep it brief – consider using bullet points to outline numbers and results.
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Keep the Federation for Community Schools Informed

Let the Federation know how your meeting/phone conversation went or what response you received from your email, letter, or fax. Be sure to include information on where your legislator stood on the issues you discussed.

Your participation gives the Federation valuable insight into the positions of members at the state and Federal levels and helps us identify strong supporters and those who need additional support or information. It also enables us to keep track of community school members who have good relationships with elected officials in the even that we need their support in the future. You can keep us updated by emailing Melissa Mitchell at Melissa@ilcommunityschools.org.