

Washington State School  
Directors' Association

# Championing Public Education: A Toolkit for Legislative Impact

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# Introduction

The purpose of this toolkit is to **help legislative representatives (also known as “leg reps”) advocate effectively for their schools.** Being a leg rep means speaking up for your school district's needs and making sure your voice is heard by lawmakers. It also means you are timely and accurately conveying to your board what's happening during and between legislative sessions. This toolkit will give you the tools and knowledge you need to do this job well.

However, its utility extends beyond legislative representatives. The tools, insights, and strategies presented here are valuable for anyone involved in educational advocacy, including school directors, administrators, and community advocates, supporting policy development at various levels.

Every school district is unique, with its own challenges and strengths. Similarly, every leg rep comes with a different background and set of experiences. This toolkit recognizes these differences and aims to provide support that is useful no matter your starting point. **Whether you are from a small rural district or a large urban one, and whether you are new to this role or have been doing it for years, this toolkit is designed to help you succeed.**

## Why advocacy matters

Advocacy is crucial because it helps shape the rules, policies, and laws that govern our schools. As a legislative representative (leg rep), you have the power to influence decisions that can improve education for all students in your district. Here's why your role is so important:



### Shaping educational policy

Leg reps are vital in shaping educational policy. Policies determine how schools operate, what they teach, and how they support students. By sharing your district's challenges, needs and successes with lawmakers, you help create better policies that benefit students and teachers. Your insights can lead to changes that make schools safer, more inclusive, and better equipped to prepare students for the future.



*Key educational organizations in the state of Washington*

Educational policies exist at several levels, including state policies and school district policies. Key educational and parent organizations develop policies that reflect the values and needs from these various perspectives. As a leg rep, it is important to be aware of the policies from these perspectives and to work with your board to align your district policies with those that closely match your district's climate and needs



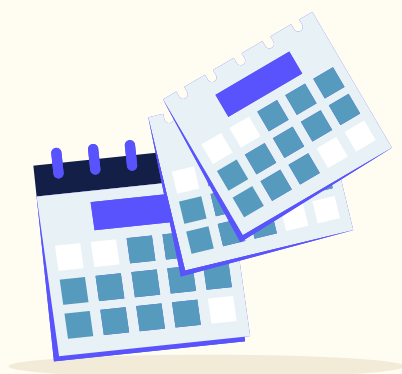


## Influencing state laws that impact public schools

Advocacy directly affects state laws that impact many facets of P-12 public education, including school funding and resources. Schools need money for books, technology, buildings, and staff. When you advocate, you tell lawmakers why your district needs more support. This can result in increased funding, which means better resources for students and teachers. Effective advocacy can lead to smaller class sizes, updated facilities, increased staffing supports, and more educational programs, all of which enhance learning.

State laws may also impact school districts by creating “unfunded mandates,” meaning that a law might be passed that will cost districts money but the law does not include state funding to help districts pay for it. Leg reps can be a critical voice in communicating to state legislators and others when unfunded mandates are being considered. In these cases, the advocacy would be directed at either funding the mandate as part of the law or not passing that law without additional and complete funding.

### *Advocacy is a year-round process*



Advocating for your school district is important all year long, not just during the legislative session. Building strong relationships with lawmakers takes time and continuous effort. By staying in touch with them throughout the year, you keep education issues at the forefront of their minds. Year-round advocacy ensures that when important decisions are made, your district’s needs are considered.

Staying informed about current issues and being ready to act when opportunities arise makes you a more effective advocate. It’s easier to influence decisions when you have established a presence and a voice that lawmakers recognize and respect. To stay informed, utilize resources such as [WSSDA's updates, newsletters, and legislative tracking tools](#). Engage with other educational organizations and subscribe to relevant news outlets to keep informed.

## How WSSDA supports you in your advocacy efforts

WSSDA has an annual cycle of renewal and usage of the [positions that form its advocacy platform](#). School board members are encouraged to learn and participate in each phase pictured below. WSSDA provides numerous resources to help you stay informed and active throughout the year, including legislative updates, advocacy tools, and direct links to important information.



### SPRING

#### **Proposal Window:**

Boards can propose changes to WSSDA's platform



### FALL

#### **General Assembly:**

Board delegates debate and vote on proposed changes to the WSSDA Platform



### WINTER

#### **Legislative Session:**

Boards can use WSSDA's positions and resources to advocate with legislators



### YEAR-ROUND

#### **Leg Rep Network Training**

# Before you get started...

As a school director, advocacy is crucial in shaping the educational landscape for your district. However, with so many responsibilities and areas of focus, it can sometimes be overwhelming to know where to begin or which aspects of your role require more attention. To help you navigate the **Championing Public Education: A Toolkit for Legislative Impact** effectively, we've developed a series of guiding statements.

Each statement corresponds to a potential challenge or area of uncertainty you might face in your role. By selecting the statement that resonates with your current experience, you will be directed to the relevant section of the toolkit. This way, you can immediately access the information and guidance that will most benefit you, allowing you to address your pain points directly and efficiently.

## ! How to use this tool

Below is a series of statements.

**01**

Review these statements and consider which ones reflect your current challenges or interests.

**02**

Click on the statement that best describes your situation, and you will be taken directly to the section of the toolkit that provides the information and strategies you need to overcome that challenge.

**This tool is designed to be revisited as your advocacy efforts evolve.** As you gain confidence in some areas, you may encounter new challenges. Use this tool to ensure you are equipped with the right knowledge and resources.



## Legislative Representative Navigation Statements

### UNDERSTANDING THE LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE'S ROLE



**I NEED** help understanding the foundational responsibilities and expectations of my role as a legislative representative.

PAGE 13



**I STRUGGLE** to clearly define the specific responsibilities of a legislative representative (leg rep) and how they differ from other roles on the school board.

PAGE 13



**I AM UNSURE** of my responsibilities at the board, state, and federal levels as a leg rep.

PAGE 13



### UNDERSTANDING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



**I NEED** help understanding how the legislative process works and how I can effectively engage with it.

PAGE 33



**I OFTEN** find it difficult to understand the structure and function of the Washington State Legislature.

PAGE 34



**I AM UNCLEAR** about the steps involved in how an idea becomes a law in Washington State.

PAGE 35



## ADVOCACY SKILLS



**I NEED** help communicating effectively to represent and advocate for my district's needs.

PAGE 42



**I OFTEN** feel uncertain about how to communicate with legislators, including writing emails, making phone calls, and holding in-person meetings.

PAGE 44



**I AM UNSURE** about how to maintain a nonpartisan stance in my advocacy efforts, especially when dealing with contentious issues.

PAGE 30



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



**I NEED** help engaging with my community and gathering input to guide my advocacy efforts.

PAGE 38



**I STRUGGLE** to gather meaningful input from my community and use that information to guide my advocacy efforts.

PAGE 38



**I FIND IT** difficult to organize and attend local events to engage with my community effectively.

PAGE 40



**I AM UNSURE** how to effectively use social media and other digital tools to communicate with my community and advocate for educational issues.

PAGE 39



## MENTORSHIP AND LEADERSHIP



**I FEEL** uncertain about how to engage with student representatives and guide them effectively in their roles.

PAGE 23



**I LACK** confidence in representing my school board at WSSDA General Assembly and other state-level meetings.

PAGE 17



**I STRUGGLE** to prioritize legislative positions and coordinate board efforts in a way that aligns with the needs of my district.

PAGE 63



## TIME MANAGEMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



**I NEED** help managing my time effectively and continuously improving my advocacy efforts.

PAGE 26



**I RARELY** seek feedback on my advocacy efforts, and when I do, I struggle to use it to improve my approach.

PAGE 57



**I AM UNSURE** how to set and track goals for my advocacy work.

PAGE 60



# GETTING STARTED

## ! In this section...

Explore the **essential aspects of serving as a Leg Rep**. This includes **understanding the role, the expected duration and time commitment, and core responsibilities** such as **advocacy, attending events, and representing your district**. You'll also gain insight into **participating in the WSSDA General Assembly**, where Leg Reps collaborate to define legislative priorities around policies impacting schools across Washington. Additionally, this section covers the **importance of continuous, year-round advocacy** and provides **recommendations on mentoring student representatives**.

### Key takeaways



#### **Core Responsibilities:**

A Leg Rep's main duties include reviewing policy proposals with your board, keeping them informed about legislative developments, and communicating directly with legislators to represent your district's interests.



#### **General Assembly Participation:**

The WSSDA General Assembly allows you to vote on key proposals, set policy priorities, and collaborate with other Leg Reps, making it an essential event for policy impact.



#### **Commitment and Skills:**

Serving as a Leg Rep usually spans a recommended two-year term with a monthly time investment of 2-20 hours. Skills in nonpartisan communication, relationship management, and advocacy are crucial for success.



#### **Mentoring Student Representatives:**

Supporting student representatives helps them effectively contribute to board discussions and share insights from the student perspective, fostering a well-rounded advocacy approach.

### Important links and resources



[WSSDA Publications](#)



[Washington's House of Representative Member Directory](#)



[Washington's Senate Member Directory](#)



[Federal Relations Network](#)



[National School Boards Association \(NSBA\)](#)



[WSSDA Leg Rep Advocacy Webpage](#)



[WSSDA Legislative Updates](#)



[The Role of Legislative Representatives](#)



[Establishing Your Board Priorities for the Next Legislative Session](#)



[Mentoring Student Representatives](#)

# Getting started

## To be a Leg Rep: What it means (and doesn't)



### Length of service:

Each school board can decide how long a member will serve as a legislative representative (leg rep). However, it is recommended that a leg rep serves for at least two years. This allows them to fully understand and grow into the role.

Many Boards are adopting a staggered 2-person leg rep cycle, given the amount of work needed to be really effective.



### Time commitment:

The time needed to effectively serve as a leg rep can vary. It depends on what the school board expects and the level of interest from the representative. On average, current leg reps estimate that they spend between 2 and 20 hours per month on their responsibilities in addition to their regular school board volunteer hours.



### Responsibilities:

As outlined in WSSDA's Operating Policy 2051, here are the suggested responsibilities of a legislative representative:



#### Review WSSDA position proposals:

Before the annual General Assembly, review WSSDA position proposals with your board. It might be helpful to schedule a special meeting to allow enough time for discussion.



#### Provide legislative updates:

Periodically update your board on legislative matters. Some boards include a standing legislative representative update in their meeting agendas.



#### Share information:

Distribute information from WSSDA publications and communications to your board and community. Below are some examples of publications and communications you could share with your board and your community:

[Direct Newsmagazine](#)

[eClippings](#)

[The Basics of School Law](#)



You can find WSSDA's most important publications at <https://wssda.org/publications/>

- ✓ **Coordinate board efforts:**  
Help your board propose new WSSDA positions or amendments to existing ones. This discussion can happen as early as October the preceding year.
- ✓ **Represent your board:**  
Attend state-level meetings such as the General Assembly, the Olympia Legislative Conference, and any area or regional workshops to represent your board.
- ✓ **Communicate with legislators:**  
Contact and communicate with legislators when there are important legislative issues.
- ✓ **Monitor legislative developments:**  
Keep track of legislative developments at both the state and federal levels.
- ✓ **Engage in year-round advocacy:**  
Your role in advocacy goes beyond going to Capitol Hill during legislative sessions and staying on top of the discussion on specific bills. Advocacy is a year-round process and there are things you can do in between legislative sessions.
- ✓ **Collaborate with other Board members,** including the previous Leg Rep to ensure continuity of transition and help with spreading the workload to other members that may be interested in specific positions.
- ✓ **Collaborate with other districts and education organizations** to develop alliances around positions that are important to your students/district.

! You can find a suggested timeline for legislative activities [here](#).





## Board level responsibilities:

### ✓ Prioritize legislative positions:

Work with your board to decide which legislative positions are most important.

### ✓ Represent your board at the General Assembly:

Attend the General Assembly and speak on behalf of your board.

### ✓ Propose new positions or amendments:

Help your board propose new positions or amendments to existing ones.

## State level responsibilities



### Get involved in the legislative session:

Participate in the legislative session to stay informed and advocate for your district.



### Write and deliver testimony:

Prepare and deliver testimony on legislative issues affecting your district. Here's how to effectively prepare and present your testimony:

01

### Identify Key Issues

Focus on legislative issues that have a significant impact on your district. Research these issues thoroughly to understand their implications.



02

### Draft Your Testimony



- a. Introduction:** Begin with a brief introduction of yourself and your role as a legislative representative for your district.
- b. State the Issue:** Clearly outline the issue you are addressing and why it is important.
- c. Present Facts and Data:** Support your arguments with relevant facts, data, and examples from your district.
- d. Personal Stories:** Include personal stories or anecdotes from school staff or community members that highlight the real-life impact of the issue on students and teachers.
- e. Conclusion:** Summarize your key points and make a clear call to action, specifying what you want the legislators to do.



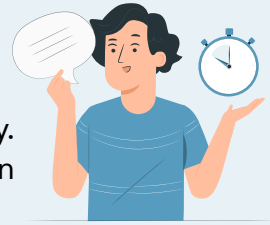
03

### Reach Out to Legislators:

Contact the offices of key legislators who are involved in the relevant committees. Request an opportunity to present your testimony during a committee hearing.

### Practice Your Delivery:

Rehearse your testimony to ensure clarity and confidence in your delivery. Time yourself to stay within any specified time limits.



04

### Present with Confidence

During the hearing, speak clearly and confidently. Be prepared to answer questions from the legislators.



05



### Build relationships with legislators:

Develop and maintain relationships with state legislators. Click on the links to find your state [representatives](#) and [senators](#).

## Federal Level Responsibilities



### Get involved with the federal relations network:

Participate in the Federal Relations Network (FRN) to stay informed about federal issues affecting education. The FRN connects local school board members with members of Congress to advocate for public education. To get involved, visit the [Federal Relations Network](#) page for more information and resources on how to participate.



### Build relationships with congressional delegation:

Develop and maintain relationships with your congressional delegation. This involves regular communication and meetings to discuss your district's needs and concerns. Building these relationships can help ensure that your district's issues are heard at the federal level.



### Write and send emails

Communicate with federal legislators via email to advocate for your district's needs. To gain access to federal legislators and their contact information, you can:

- Visit the official [U.S. House of Representatives](#) and [U.S. Senate](#) websites.
- Use advocacy platforms provided by organizations such as the [National School Boards Association \(NSBA\)](#) to send pre-drafted emails or customize your messages.

Engage in these activities regularly to ensure your district's voice is represented in federal policy discussions. For additional guidance and resources, explore the [NSBA's advocacy section](#).



Download the Role of Legislative Representatives One-Pager [here](#)

### ! REMEMBER...

*The role of a legislative representative is inherently nonpartisan. This means that your advocacy should focus on the needs and interests of your school district rather than aligning with any political party.*

### Keep in mind:



Your primary goal is to **advocate for policies that benefit your schools and students**, regardless of which political party they belong to.



You need to **cultivate relationships with legislators from all political backgrounds to ensure broad support** for your advocacy efforts.



You should **keep discussions centered on educational issues and avoid engaging in partisan political debates**. This helps maintain credibility and effectiveness in your role.

## The role of the leg rep in WSSDA General Assembly

### What is WSSDA's General Assembly?

General Assembly is a key event organized by WSSDA. During this event, school board members from across the state come together to discuss and vote on important issues that affect all public schools in Washington. It's a time for school boards to have their voices heard and to help shape the policies that will impact education.

## Why is General Assembly important?



### Shaping Policies:

General Assembly is where important decisions about WSSDA's advocacy platform are made. Your participation helps ensure that your school district's needs and concerns are considered in these decisions.



### Setting Priorities:

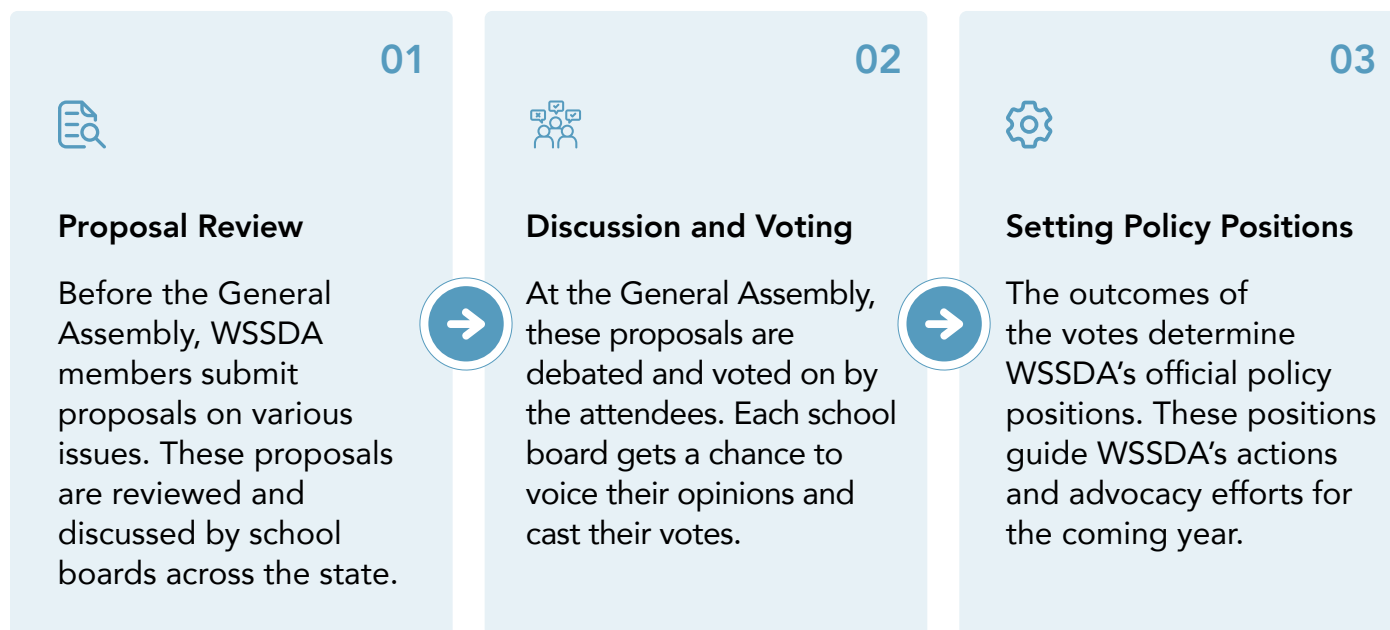
During General Assembly, school board members vote on various proposals. These votes determine WSSDA's official positions on key issues. These positions guide WSSDA's advocacy efforts throughout the year.



### Collaboration & Advocacy:

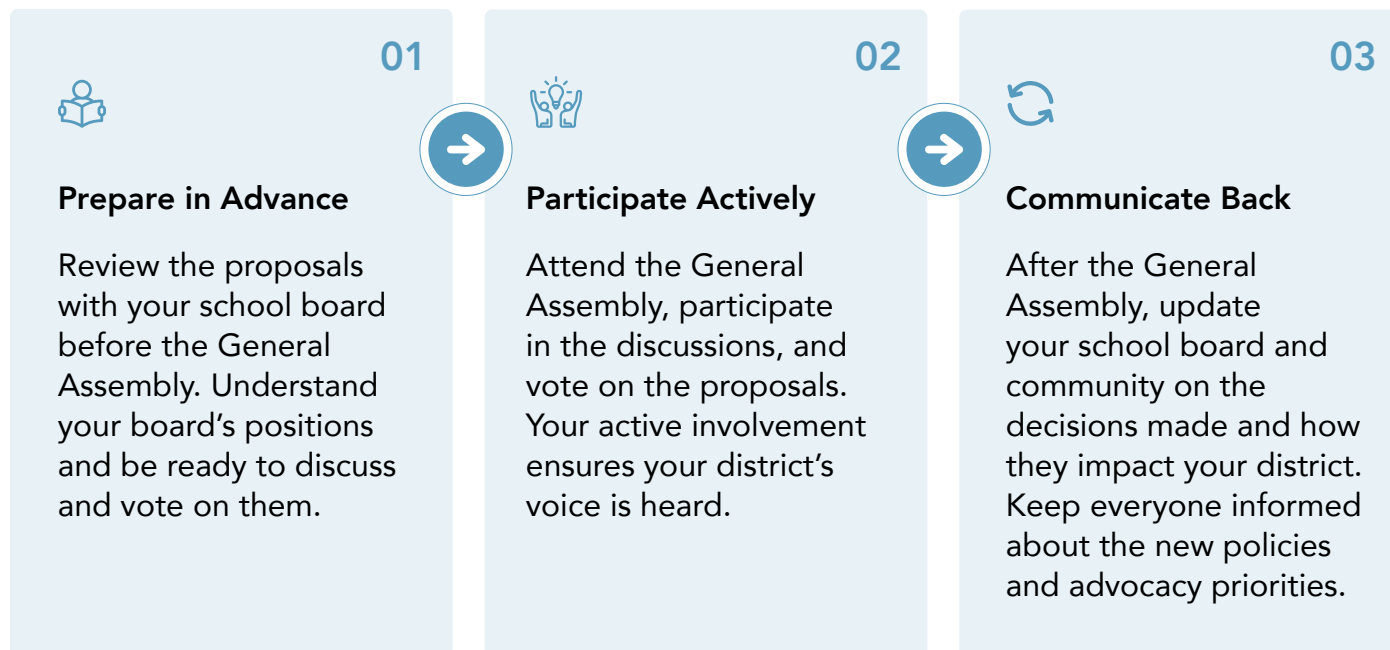
The General Assembly offers a valuable opportunity to collaborate with fellow school board members, sharing ideas and strategies that benefit districts across the state. Your participation also helps shape WSSDA's advocacy efforts, ensuring they reflect the real needs of public schools and influence legislation that supports education.

## How Does the General Assembly Work?



## Your Role in WSSDA's General Assembly

As a legislative representative, your role is crucial. Here's how you can be effective:

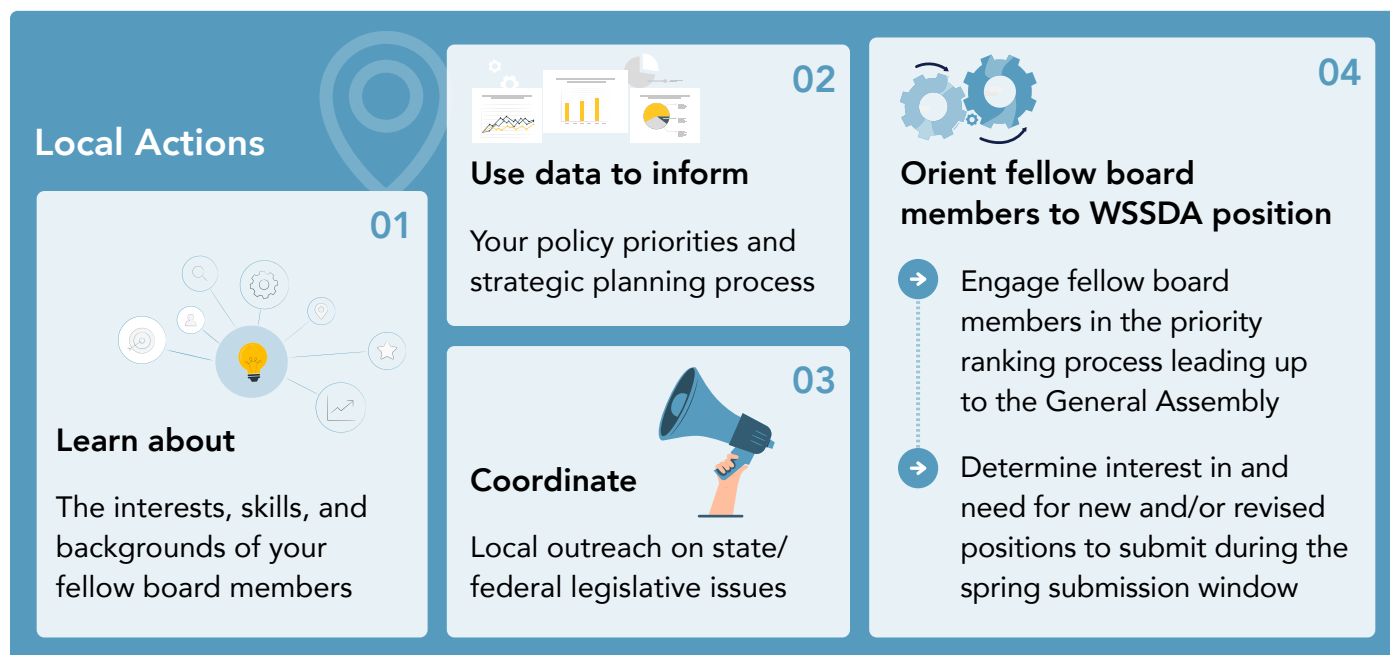


\*If you are unable to attend the entire General Assembly, partner with other board colleagues. At any given time during the assembly, each district gets a vote, but the person representing the district's vote can change during the assembly.

 Download our [tipsheet on establishing board priorities for the next legislative session](#).

## Advocating year-round

Succeeding in advocacy efforts requires year-round activity at the local, state, and federal levels. To help school boards plan accordingly, we've outlined the steps and timing for maximizing your efforts.



## State-level Actions

### Expand lens

as local board members  
to Director Area (DA)  
and state



01

### Follow session

happenings via  
WSSDA InSession



02

### Make connections and increase sphere of influence



Plan trips to Olympia  
with students



Attend Legislative  
Conference & Day on  
the Hill



04

### Identify common ground

with other advocates

05

### Thank your legislators



for a job well done

## Federal-level Actions

### Join

the Federal  
Relations  
Network



01

### Develop relationships

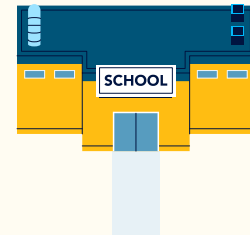
with your Congress  
members



02

### Invite Congress members

to visit your schools



03



04

### Advocate using

your real life experience'  
tell stories

05

### Thank your Congress members



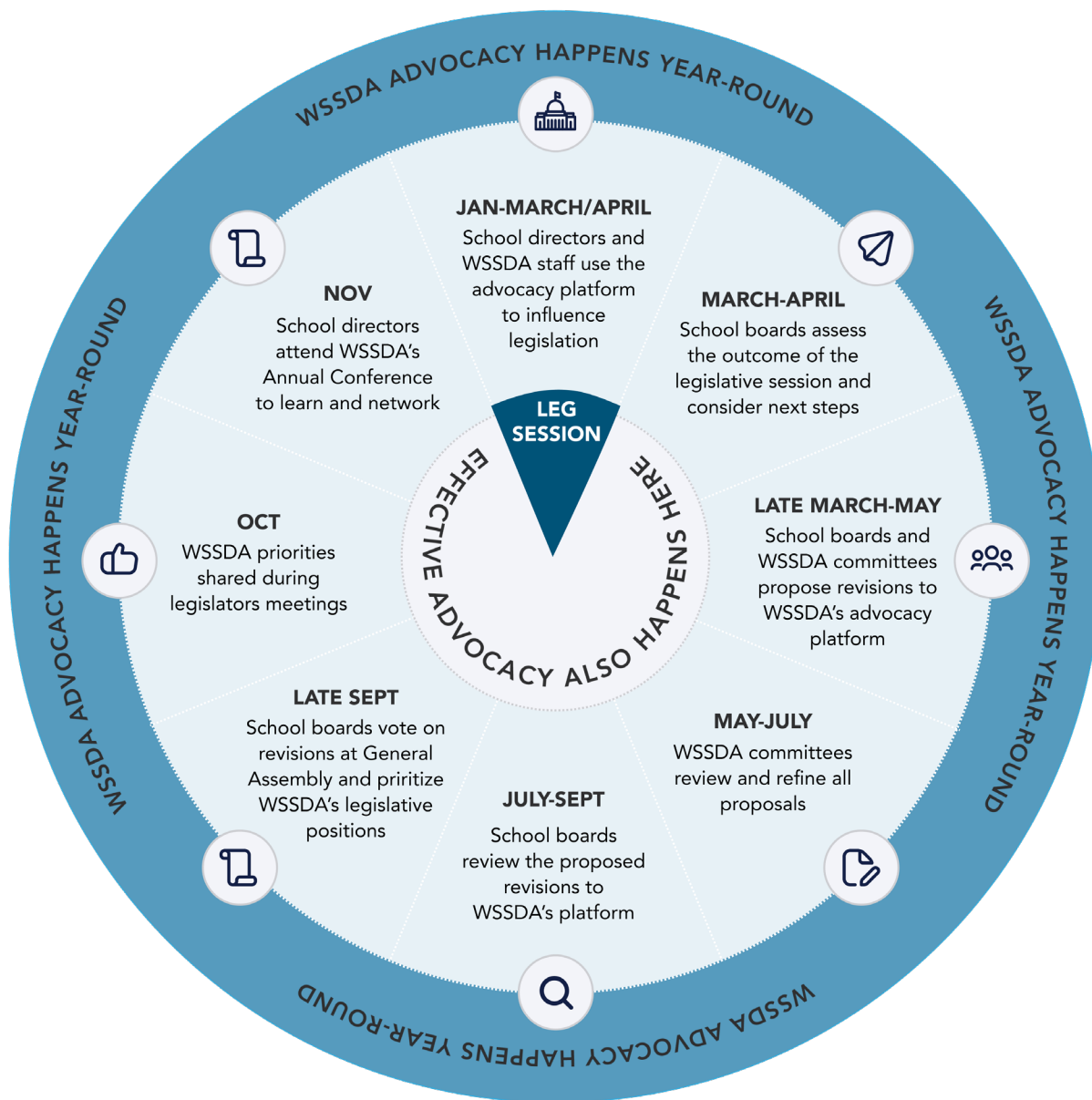
for a job well done

Building an advocacy platform for WSSDA is also a continuous, year-round process designed to ensure that the needs and priorities of school boards are consistently represented and addressed. The cyclical nature of this process includes various stages such as legislative sessions, proposal revisions, and continuous engagement with legislators and the community. This approach ensures that advocacy efforts are timely, well-prepared, and impactful.



## The voice of school director

### Building the advocacy Platform
















### WSSDA's year-round engagement strategy`

Throughout the year, WSSDA members engage in activities such as attending legislative sessions, proposing and refining advocacy platform revisions, and sharing priorities with legislators. By maintaining regular communication and collaboration, school directors can effectively influence educational policy and secure necessary resources for schools. This ongoing process is essential for achieving sustained and meaningful improvements in the educational system, ensuring that the voices of school directors are heard consistently and effectively. For more details on WSSDA's strategic advocacy efforts, visit the [WSSDA Leg Rep Advocacy page](#).

## Suggested Timeline for Legislative Activities

To maximize your advocacy efforts, it is important to follow a structured timeline throughout the legislative session and the year. Here is a suggested timeline for your legislative activities:

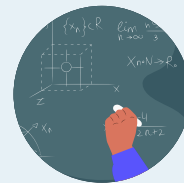
NOV	<div>Pre-Session</div> <div>01</div>	<div></div> <div>Research and Preparation</div> <div>Review WSSDA's legislative positions and priorities. Familiarize yourself with the legislative calendar and key dates.</div>	<div></div> <div>Contact Legislators</div> <div>Schedule introductory meetings or calls with your local legislators to discuss upcoming session priorities.</div>	<div></div> <div>Community Engagement</div> <div>Gather input from your school board and community on key issues and priorities.</div>
DEC				
JAN	<div>Early Session</div> <div>02</div>	<div></div> <div>Bill Monitoring</div> <div>Start tracking bills that affect education and your district's priorities. Utilize WSSDA's Bill Watch List for updates.</div>	<div></div> <div>Committee Hearings</div> <div>Attend or monitor key committee hearings. Prepare to provide testimony if necessary.</div>	<div></div> <div>Legislative Updates</div> <div>Provide regular updates to your school board on legislative developments and potential impacts.</div>
FEB				
MAR	<div>Mid-Session</div> <div>03</div>	<div></div> <div>Advocacy Push</div> <div>Intensify your advocacy efforts as bills move through committees. Contact legislators to support or oppose key legislation.</div>	<div></div> <div>Attend Events</div> <div>Participate in WSSDA's Legislative Conference and Day on the Hill.</div>	<div></div> <div>Community Reports</div> <div>Share progress and updates with your community to keep them informed and engaged.</div>
APR				
MAY	<div>Late Session</div> <div>04</div>	<div></div> <div>Final Advocacy Efforts</div> <div>Focus on the final push for key bills. Continue to engage with legislators and provide any last-minute testimony or support.</div>		<div></div> <div>Session Recap</div> <div>Once the session ends, provide a comprehensive update to your school board and community on the outcomes of the session and how it impacts your district.</div>
JUN				
JUL	<div>Post-Session</div> <div>05</div>	<div></div> <div>Reflect and Plan</div> <div>Review the successes and challenges of the past session. Start planning for the next session.</div>		<div></div> <div>Continuous Engagement</div> <div>Maintain relationships with legislators and continue to engage with your community on ongoing advocacy efforts.</div>
OCT				

## Mentoring student representatives

As a legislative representative (leg rep), part of your role includes mentoring student representatives. These students provide a vital perspective to the school board, representing their peers' views and concerns. Mentoring student reps involves:



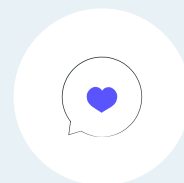
Listening to, learning from and acting on the perspectives of student representatives.



Guiding student representatives in their duties.



Helping student representatives understand board processes.



Supporting student representatives' development as leaders.

Student voice is essential in school board discussions. Providing guidance and support to student reps ensures they can effectively share their insights and contribute to decision-making. By mentoring student reps, you help them develop confidence and skills that benefit both the board and their personal growth. It also provides you with an opportunity to learn more about the young people in your district and how best to make decisions that attend to their specific needs and insights.



To learn more about the importance of student representatives and how to engage with them, **download our quick guide** [here](#).

# ADDRESSING THE MOST COMMON CHALLENGES

## ! In this section...

Find practical recommendations on overcoming obstacles in your role as a Leg Rep. This section covers effective time management strategies, tips for staying informed on legislative updates, and keys to navigating complex funding and legislative processes. You'll also find tips on building confidence, including incremental goal-setting and learning from seasoned Leg Reps. For managing political dynamics, this section provides strategies to maintain a nonpartisan stance, work effectively with diverse political perspectives, and use assertive communication to handle differences constructively.

### Key takeaways



- **Overcoming Barriers:**  
To manage your responsibilities effectively, this section addresses time management, accessing vital legislative updates, and understanding both school funding mechanisms and legislative processes.
- **Confidence Building:**  
Starting small, seeking mentorship, and regular practice are essential steps to becoming a more confident advocate.
- **Navigating Political Issues:**  
Learn techniques to maintain a nonpartisan approach, work across political divides, and separate personal views from professional responsibilities. These strategies are essential for building trust and credibility in your advocacy role.

### Important links and resources



- [!\[\]\(e6ddc77b791299d975007937cebef274\_img.jpg\) Legislative Representative Advocacy Webpage](#)
- [!\[\]\(ab52e27d061d76db54e182891376cff5\_img.jpg\) Leg Rep Dashboard](#)
- [!\[\]\(62325268b83c539c826661482098edc3\_img.jpg\) Legislative Updates](#)
- [!\[\]\(576eae82d6cd110cfd50d3e0356faa5a\_img.jpg\) How to Advocate Year-Round](#)
- [!\[\]\(433d19d9bdeac46075af10d8acb0c69a\_img.jpg\) Bill Tracker](#)
- [!\[\]\(6d7be85c6a97460dda8fae4160076286\_img.jpg\) WSSDA Positions Catalog](#)
- [!\[\]\(6821accee9ffc315d041eee2faac4aff\_img.jpg\) WSSDA Funding FAQ Document](#)
- [!\[\]\(a429abaf87b67f8fc452687d739f1fb1\_img.jpg\) Organization and Financing of Washington's Public Schools](#)
- [!\[\]\(bea4b3fa5635883f1239b8b72dd62605\_img.jpg\) Handling Political and Partisan Issues Constructively: A Guide for Legislative](#)

# Addressing the most common challenges



## Overcoming barriers

When you first start serving as a leg rep, you may encounter several challenges, and it can feel overwhelming. Before diving into each of these challenges, the first thing you need to know is that you are not alone in this sentiment.

Being a school director alone is challenging. It takes time to understand how your school board operates, the funding mechanisms, what's expected of you, and what isn't.

Adding a little bit more to the pot can soon make you feel overwhelmed.

There are two key concepts you need to grasp to successfully overcome these challenges and effectively serve your board, your district, and, ultimately, your students.

The first point we would like you to take away is that **this is a continuous process**. As you develop some of your advocacy skills, you'll identify new areas of opportunity. As you get a system in place to regularly report back to your board, you'll soon realize the need to stay in touch with your legislators between sessions. The list can go on, but you get the point.

Approach every new challenge as a learning opportunity, and do not expect to follow all our recommendations by the book from day one. An approach based on continuous improvement will more likely get you better and sustainable outcomes.

The second point is about using the resources you have available, such as:

✓ New board director training,

✓ Mentoring and support from experienced leg reps,

✓ and participating in the Leg Rep Network.

New board director training is very important for your success as a legislative representative. This training gives you a strong understanding of the legislative process, key educational policies, and effective advocacy strategies. By joining these training sessions, you learn valuable information and build confidence in your role. These programs also teach best practices and common mistakes, helping you navigate the complexities of our public school system and education advocacy.

Mentoring and support from experienced leg reps are equally important. Building connections with seasoned representatives can be very helpful. These mentors can provide guidance, share their experiences, and offer practical advice on handling various challenges. They can also help you understand how to work with legislators and effectively communicate your district's needs.

Additionally, make use of the Leg Rep Network. This network is a valuable resource that connects you with other legislative representatives. It offers support, information, and a community of people committed to educational advocacy. Engaging with this network ensures you are not alone and can rely on others who are knowledgeable and dedicated to the same cause. For more information, visit [WSSDA's Leg Rep Advocacy page](#).

## Managing your time effectively

### Challenge:

Balancing leg rep duties with other responsibilities.

### Tips to overcome this challenge:



#### Set a Regular Schedule:

Allocate specific times each week for advocacy activities.



#### Prioritize Tasks:

First, focus on urgent and important tasks. You can also prioritize tasks based on the season or where they fall within the legislative cycle.



#### Use Tools:

Utilize digital calendars and to-do lists to stay organized. A good example is this [Leg Rep Dashboard](#) which can help you prioritize your efforts year-round.



## Access to important information and updates

### Challenge:

Keeping up with legislative and advocacy information, resources, and updates.

### Tips to overcome this challenge:



#### Regularly Check Resources:

Frequently visit the WSSDA website for updates and reports. Spend some time navigating through the website. Sometimes, this is the best way to familiarize yourself with the resources available and where to find them.



#### Schedule an onboarding meeting:

Contact WSSDA's Strategic Advocacy team and schedule a time to walk you through the resources available to support you in your role as a Leg Rep.



## CONTINUE

**Challenge:**

Keeping up with legislative and advocacy information, resources, and updates.



- **Join WSSDA's "InSession Live":**  
These happen on Thursdays (during session only) from 12 pm to 1 pm PST.
- **Attend the monthly Leg Rep Network Meeting:**  
Participate in WSSDA's Leg Rep Network session to get a chance to connect with other legislative representatives. It offers support, information, and a community of people committed to educational advocacy. For more information, visit [WSSDA's Leg Rep Advocacy page](#).
- **Subscribe to WSSDA's Strategic Advocacy mailing list:**  
Subscribe to our state, federal or student advocacy lists. You'll get timely and valuable information about WSSDA's legislative advocacy plus opportunities for your own engagement around K-12 public education. Sign up here: [https://wssda.formstack.com/forms/legislative\\_updates](https://wssda.formstack.com/forms/legislative_updates)
- **Review our recommended actions for year-round advocacy** at <https://wssda.org/strategic-advocacy/how-to-advocate-year-round/>
- **Regularly check on the bills WSSDA is tracking** at <https://wssda.org/strategic-advocacy/legislative-updates/bill-watch-list/>
- **Get familiar with WSSDA's Positions** at <https://wssda.org/about-us/permanent-and-legislative-positions/positions-catalog/>

## Communication barriers

**Challenge:**

Effectively communicating with legislators and the community.

**Tips to overcome this challenge:**

- **Practice Communication:**  
Regularly practice public speaking and writing. Feel free to share some of your content with the WSSDA Strategic Advocacy team. We will be happy to provide feedback and talking points as needed.
- **Use Templates:**  
Use communication templates for emails, letters, and phone scripts. Some of the most common templates are available [here](#).
- **Seek Feedback:**  
Get input from colleagues or mentors to improve your messaging.

## Understanding funding mechanisms

### Challenge:

Understanding school funding, including local levies, state contributions, and federal grants.



### Tips to overcome this challenge:



#### **Learn the Basics:**

Get to know how school funding works, including local levies, state money, and federal grants. WSSDA's Public School Finances FAQ document could be a great starting point. You can find it [here](#).



#### **Explore OSPI resources:**

Go deeper into the subject by checking some of the resources publicly available on the OSPI website:

<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2024-01/organizationandfinancingofwpublicschools.pdf>

## Navigating legislative processes

### Challenge:

Understanding how the legislative process works.



### Tips to overcome this challenge:



#### **Familiarize Yourself with the Process:**

Learn the stages a bill goes through, from introduction to the governor's signature. Use WSSDA's legislative resources to get a detailed overview of each step in the process. This will help you understand when and how to advocate for your district effectively.



#### **Understand the Role of Committees:**

Committees play a crucial role in reviewing and debating bills before they move forward. Identify key committees relevant to education and follow their activities. Attend or watch committee hearings to stay informed about education policy discussions and decisions.



#### **Understand the Legislative Calendar:**

Knowing the [legislative calendar](#) helps ensure timely advocacy and effective participation. Mark important dates, such as the start and end of sessions, deadlines for bill submissions, and committee meetings, on your calendar. WSSDA provides calendars and reminders to help you stay on track.

## Building confidence

Starting as a leg rep can feel daunting, but building confidence is key. Here are some tips to help you grow in your role:



### Start small

When you begin, tackle small tasks first. This could be as simple as sending an introductory email to your legislators or attending a local community event. These small successes will help build your confidence over time.



**Tip:** Write a short email introducing yourself and your role. Attend a local school or community event to meet people and start building connections.



### Learn from others

Reading stories and testimonials from successful legislative reps can be very motivating. Hearing about their experiences and strategies provides valuable insights and helps you understand that you are not alone in facing challenges.



**Tip:** Look for articles, interviews, or videos featuring experienced legislative reps. Note their strategies and think about how you can apply them to your own role. Attend Leg Rep Network monthly calls.



### Practice, practice, practice

The more you engage in advocacy activities, the more comfortable you will become. Regularly practice your public speaking and advocacy skills to improve over time.



**Tip:** Start by practicing speaking in front of a mirror or with friends and family. Gradually, try speaking at small community meetings or events. The more you practice, the more confident you will feel.

## Handling partisan issues.



### Strategies for maintaining a nonpartisan stance

To be an effective legislative representative, it's crucial to maintain a nonpartisan stance. This means focusing on the needs and interests of your school district rather than aligning with any political party.



**Tip:** Always prioritize the educational outcomes over political debates. Frame your advocacy messages around how policies affect students and schools rather than political ideologies.



**Tip:** Cultivate relationships with legislators from all political backgrounds. This ensures broad support for your advocacy efforts and demonstrates your commitment to serving all students.



### Working with legislators and stakeholders with differing political views

Working with people who have different political views can be challenging but also rewarding if done constructively.



**Tip:** Find common goals and values, such as improving education quality or increasing school safety. Use these shared objectives as a foundation for collaboration.



**Tip:** Stay informed about the perspectives and priorities of different political parties. This knowledge helps you frame your advocacy messages in a way that resonates with diverse stakeholders.



## Separate personal views from professional responsibilities

As a legislative representative, your role is to represent the collective voice of your school board and district, not your personal opinions. It's essential to separate your personal views from your professional responsibilities.



**Tip:** Regularly remind yourself and your colleagues that the primary focus is on the well-being of the students and schools. Personal political beliefs should not interfere with your duty to advocate for the best interests of the district.

## Techniques for assertive communication and managing political differences constructively

Effective communication is key to managing political differences constructively. Assertive communication allows you to express your views clearly and respectfully.



**Tip:** Use "I" statements to express your opinions without sounding accusatory (e.g., "I feel..." instead of "You are..."). When asking a question, a helpful way is to start with "I'm wondering...". This approach helps in maintaining a respectful dialogue.



**Tip:** Listen actively to the other person's perspective. Acknowledge their points before presenting your own. This demonstrates respect and can pave the way for more productive conversations.



**Tip:** Stay calm and composed, even in heated discussions. Keeping your emotions in check helps maintain a professional demeanor and facilitates better conflict resolution.

By employing these strategies and tips, you can navigate political and partisan issues effectively, ensuring that your advocacy remains focused on improving education for all students in your district.



For more detailed guides and practical tips, **download** [WSSDA's tipsheet on handling political and partisan issues constructively](#).

# BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATIVE

## ! In this section...

Gain insight into the **legislative process in Washington State**, including how ideas become laws and an overview of **current educational policies and priorities**. This section emphasizes the **importance of relationship-building**, offering practical tips for **connecting with legislators** and maintaining these connections over time. Additionally, it highlights **strategies for gathering community input** and organizing events to ensure your advocacy reflects local needs. The section concludes with **communication skills** crucial for Leg Reps, including **public speaking, conflict resolution, and active listening**, with templates and bullet-point summaries for clarity and consistency in messaging.

## Key takeaways



- **Understanding the Legislative Process:**  
Familiarize yourself with the Washington State legislative structure, the process of lawmaking, and the current priorities in educational policy. These elements are foundational for effective advocacy.
- **Building Relationships with Legislators:**  
Initiating contact, establishing rapport, and maintaining communication with legislators are key to long-term advocacy success.
- **Community Engagement:**  
Effective Leg Reps actively gather input from their community, attend events, and represent local needs, ensuring advocacy aligns with community priorities.
- **Communication Skills:**  
Public speaking, conflict resolution, active listening, and clear messaging are essential skills. Templates and bullet-point summaries are provided to support clear and consistent communication.

## Important links and resources



- [WSSDA Legislative Priorities](#)
- [Legislative Representative Advocacy Webpage](#)
- [How to Effectively Engage with Your Community](#)
- [OSPI's Community Conversation Toolkit](#)
- [Public Speaking and Presentation Skills](#)
- [Guide: Conflict Resolution Techniques](#)
- [Guide: Active Listening and Thoughtful Responses](#)



# Becoming an effective leg rep



## Understanding the legislative process

The first step in being a good legislative advocate is to understand how things work. Knowing both the legislative process and the issues is key. Being prepared makes you more confident and effective. This section will help you learn about Washington State's legislative process and the resources available to help you understand important issues for you and your district.

### Overview of the Washington State legislature

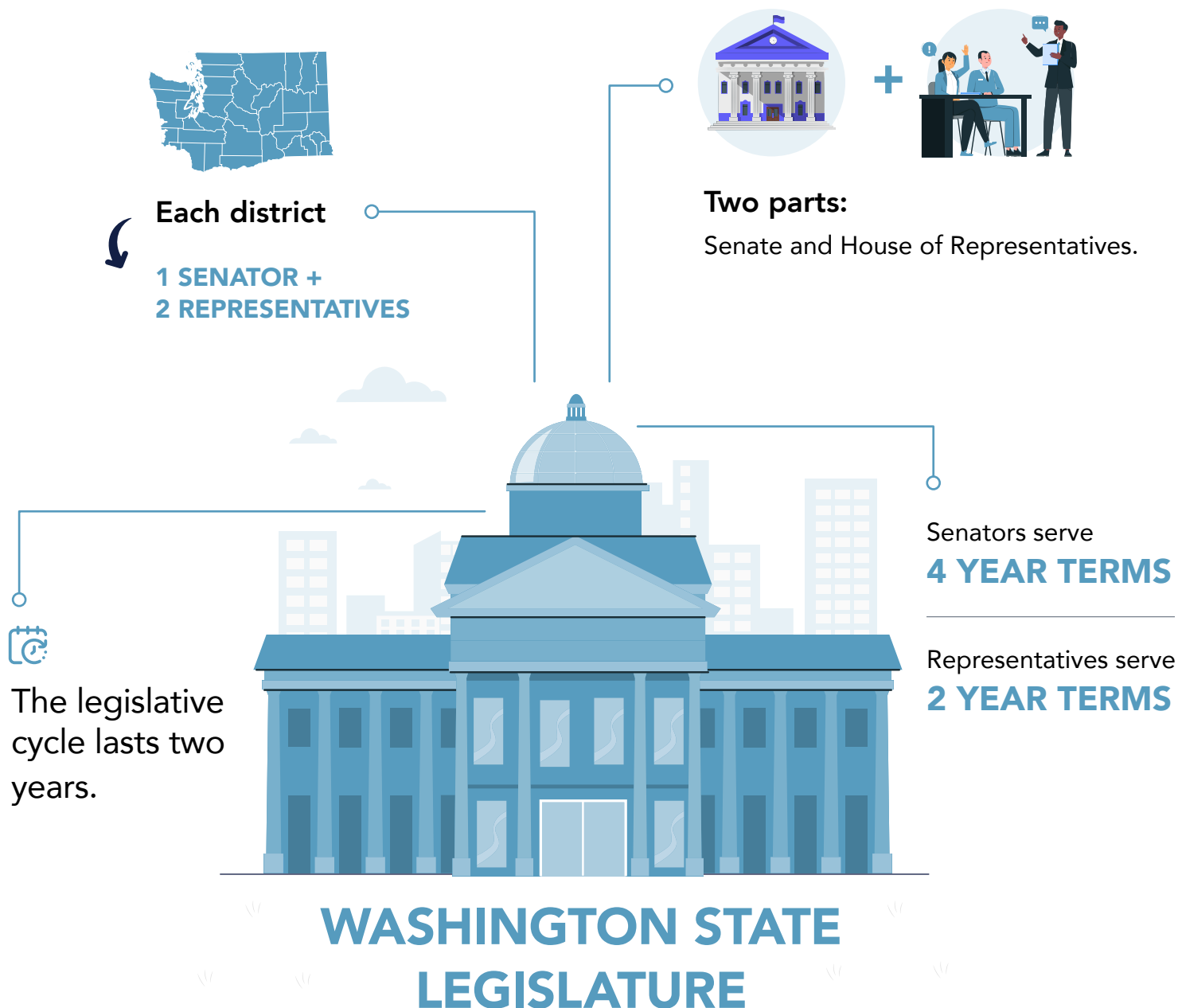
The Washington State Legislature has two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Washington has 49 legislative districts. Each district elects one Senator and two Representatives. Senators serve four-year terms, and Representatives serve two-year terms. Both the Senate and the House meet every year to create new laws, change old ones, and decide on the state budget.

The legislative cycle lasts two years. There are two types of sessions: regular sessions and special sessions. Regular sessions are required by the state constitution and start the second Monday in January each year. In odd-numbered years, regular sessions last 105 days. In even-numbered years, they last 60 days. Special sessions are called by the governor or by a two-thirds vote of the Legislature to address specific issues, usually the budget. These sessions can last no more than 30 days, and there can be several special sessions within a two-year cycle.

Legislators (members of the House and Senate) propose bills to be considered. Ideas for bills come from many sources, like recent events, issues specific to a district, or major topics the Legislature wants to address. Changes in technology can also lead to new bills.

Once a bill is introduced, it goes through several steps. If it passes all the steps in the first house (either the Senate or the House), it moves to the second house to go through the same steps. Sometimes similar (companion) bills are introduced in both the House and Senate at the same time, and at some point, one version is chosen by both houses or amended to address issues from either house. Each step is outlined and explained below to help you understand how an idea becomes a law in Washington State.



### Two types of sessions

#### REGULAR SESSIONS:

- Required by the state constitution.
- In odd-numbered years, they last 105 days.
- In even numbered years, they last 60 days.

#### SPECIAL SESSIONS:

- Called by the governor or by 2/3 of the Legislature.
- Focused on a specific subject.
- Can last no more than 30 days.

## How an idea becomes a law

The legislative process begins with an idea, which can be proposed by legislators, constituents, or advocacy groups. Here's a simplified overview of how a bill becomes a law:

01



A legislator introduces a bill in either the House or the Senate.



The bill is given a number and is read for the first time.

\* This is known as the first reading

### Committee consideration

02

The bill is referred to a committee that specializes in the bill's subject matter. The committee studies the bill, holds public hearings, and may make amendments. The committee can then pass, reject, or take no action on the bill.



### Second reading

03



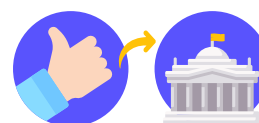
If the committee passes the bill, it is placed on the calendar for a second reading.



During this stage, the bill can be further amended.

### Third reading

04



The bill is read for the third time, debated, and voted on by the entire house. If the bill passes, it is sent to the other house where it goes through a similar process.



05

### Concurrence and conference committees:

If one house amends the bill, the other house must agree to the changes. If they do not agree, a conference committee made up of members from both houses works out the differences.

### Governor's action:

06

Once both houses pass the bill in identical form, it is sent to the governor. The governor can sign the bill into law, veto part of it, or veto all of it.



If the governor does not act on the bill within a certain number of days, it becomes law without a signature.



07

### Effective date:

Unless otherwise specified, laws typically become effective 90 days after the adjournment of the session in which they were passed.

## Overview of current educational policies and legislative priorities

Current educational policies and legislative priorities are shaped by ongoing discussions and decisions made at the state and federal levels. WSSDA's current legislative priorities are:



### **Ample, equitable, and stable public education:**

Amplify and equitably fund programs and staff based on student needs to close opportunity and achievement gaps; advance supports for Career and Technical Education; maintain the Transition to Kindergarten program; close regionalization factor gaps between adjacent districts in line with the recommendations from the 2022 K-12 basic education compensation advisory committee; and eliminate the differential access of school districts across the state to levy and levy equalization funding.



### **Advance special education:**

Fully fund the mandatory services for eligible students; remove the artificial cap; eliminate application penalties; recognize that costs vary for every district based on the uniqueness of each student and community; and expand access to inclusionary practices to improve student outcomes.



### **Build safe and healthy schools:**

Safeguard the social, emotional, and physical safety of students and staff by updating the school construction formula; supporting a simple majority vote for school bonds; increasing access to the small school modernization grant program; expanding resources for relevant and essential staff training; and engaging students and parents in decision-making.



### **Transport and feed students:**

Help students and their families to have full access to basic education by updating the STARS formula so that all costs related to student transportation are covered, and by expanding the prospect for more students to receive school meals so they can learn successfully.



You can find more information about WSSDA's Legislative priorities at <https://wssda.org/strategic-advocacy/priorities/>

WSSDA's Legislative Committee works to identify and prioritize these issues. Every year, school boards submit proposals for new legislative positions or amendments to existing ones. These are debated and voted on at General Assembly. The resulting legislative agenda guides WSSDA's advocacy efforts throughout the year.

## Building relationships



### Establish a connection with local legislators

Establishing a strong connection with local legislators is crucial for effective advocacy. These relationships allow you to communicate your district's needs directly to those who have the power to influence policy and funding decisions.



**Tip:** By building trust and a rapport with legislators, you ensure they are more likely to consider your input when making decisions that affect your schools. Consistent, positive interactions can make legislators more receptive to your advocacy efforts.



**Tip:** Legislators are more inclined to support initiatives that they understand and believe in. A personal connection can provide the context and emotional engagement that makes your advocacy more compelling.



### Tips for initiating contact with legislators

Reaching out to legislators can be daunting, but it's a necessary step in advocacy. Here are some practical tips for initiating contact:




**Tip:** Start with a formal introduction. Send a well-crafted introductory email or letter. Use a [template](#) to ensure you cover all necessary points, but personalize it to reflect your district's specific needs and your genuine interest in working together.



**Tip:** [Follow up](#) your email with a phone call to schedule a meeting. This shows your commitment and helps establish a more personal connection.




**Tip:** Be clear and concise about what you want to discuss. Legislators are busy, so respect their time by being prepared and to the point.


 **Tip:** Copy all emails and written communications to the Legislative Assistant (LA) who works for the legislator you are contacting. Frequently it is the LA who ensures that the legislator has seen each email. Similarly, meetings are often scheduled by the LA, rather than directly by the legislator.





## How to maintain ongoing communication and relationships

Building a relationship with legislators isn't a one-time effort. Continuous engagement is essential to maintaining a strong connection.

 **Tip:** Regularly update legislators on your district's achievements and challenges. This keeps them informed and shows that you are proactive and dedicated to your role.

 **Tip:** Attend community events and invite legislators to visit your schools. These informal interactions can strengthen your relationship and provide legislators with a firsthand look at your district's needs.

 **Tip:** Send periodic [emails](#) to check in and share relevant updates. These emails should be informative but concise, highlighting key points and any actions you need from them. Again, remember to copy the LA on these communications.

 **Tip:** Join the Leg Rep Network to connect with other legislative representatives and share strategies for effective advocacy. Engaging with this community can provide additional support and resources. For more information, visit [WSSDA's Leg Rep Advocacy page](#).

## Engaging with your community

### Strategies for gathering community input and identifying local needs

Effective legislative advocacy begins with a deep understanding of your community's needs and priorities. Gathering input from community members ensures that your advocacy efforts are aligned with their concerns and aspirations.

## Conduct surveys and questionnaires:

### Challenge:

Reaching a broad segment of the community.

### Solution:

Create and distribute surveys or questionnaires to parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders. These can be distributed online via email or social media, or in paper form at school events. Use simple, clear questions to gather insights on what the community values and where they see room for improvement.



**Remember:** that surveys are time consuming to create and analyze effectively, and that most districts try to keep the number of surveys to a minimum to avoid over-asking. Be sure to coordinate these efforts with district staff and use judiciously on the most critical issues that need input for decision making. Never ask for input on a topic for which action cannot be taken (e.g., lack of budget to do so).



## Hold public forums and town hall meetings:

### Challenge:

Engaging the community in meaningful discussions.

### Solution:

Organize public forums or town hall meetings where community members can voice their concerns and suggestions. Ensure these meetings are accessible to all, considering the time, location, and format. Use these gatherings to facilitate open dialogue and actively listen to the feedback provided. Consider having such gatherings in conjunction with neighboring districts who have similar needs. Consider inviting local media to attend to share the discussion about issues across your community.



## Leverage social media platforms:

### Challenge:

Ensuring continuous engagement.

### Solution:

Utilize social media platforms to create ongoing discussions and polls. Platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram can be powerful tools for reaching a wider audience. Regularly update your social media channels with relevant information and prompt community members to share their thoughts and opinions. Click [here](#) to learn more about how to leverage digital tools to strengthen your advocacy efforts.





## Form focus groups:

**Challenge:**

Diving deeper into specific issues.

**Solution:**

Form focus groups consisting of diverse stakeholders such as parents, teachers, students, and local business leaders. These smaller, more targeted discussions can provide in-depth insights into particular issues affecting the community.

## Engage with Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs):

**Challenge:**

Building strong relationships with key stakeholders.

**Solution:**

Collaborate with PTOs to gather input from a dedicated and involved group of parents and teachers. Attend PTO meetings and events to listen to their concerns and suggestions.

## Strategies for organizing and attending local events

Engaging with your community is not just about gathering input but also about being a visible and active participant in local events. This helps build trust and demonstrates your commitment to representing their interests.

### Organize school visits:

**Challenge:**

Understanding the daily realities of students and teachers.

**Solution:**

Schedule regular visits to schools within your district. During these visits, engage with students, teachers, and staff to get a firsthand look at their experiences and challenges. This can provide valuable context for your advocacy efforts. Be mindful of school and staff schedules, be clear about your purpose, and inform your board colleagues and superintendent of your visits and what you learned. Avoid making judgements about personnel or practices during your visits.

### Participate in community fairs and events:

**Challenge:**

Connecting with a broad audience.

**Solution:**

Attend community fairs, festivals, and other local events. Set up a booth or table where community members can learn about your role and share their thoughts. Use these opportunities to distribute informational materials and answer questions.

**Host informational sessions:****Challenge:**

Educating the community about key issues.

**Solution:**

Organize informational sessions or workshops on important educational topics. These can be focused on specific issues like school funding, legislative processes, or upcoming policy changes. Providing valuable information can help build your credibility and engage the community in meaningful discussions.

**Build partnerships with local organizations:****Challenge:**

Extending your reach within the community.

**Solution:**

Partner with local organizations, such as libraries, community centers, and nonprofits, to co-host events and gather input. These organizations can help you connect with different segments of the community and provide additional resources and support.

**Build partnerships with local media:****Challenge:**

Strengthening your connections with local media.

**Solution:**

Sharing communications that you've sent to legislators can be included as a letter to the editor or an op-ed in your local media. Also of course, keeping local media apprised of the various events happening in your schools.

**Maintain an open-door policy:****Challenge:**

Encouraging ongoing communication.

**Solution:**

Let community members know that you are always open to hearing their concerns and suggestions. Provide multiple ways for them to reach you, such as through email, phone, or in-person meetings. Regularly remind them of your availability and willingness to listen.

By actively engaging with your community through these strategies and tips, you can ensure that your advocacy efforts are well-informed and genuinely representative of their needs and priorities.



For more information and resources on how to effectively engage with your community, download our detailed guide [here](#).



Download [OSPI's Community Conversation Toolkit](#)

## Effective communication

As a legislative representative (leg rep), effective communication is a critical skill that will help you advocate successfully for your school district. This section provides an introduction to key communication skills and techniques, along with practical resources and tools to enhance your effectiveness.

Public speaking, presentation skills, conflict resolution, and active listening are essential for leg reps. These skills enable you to convey your district's needs clearly, navigate difficult conversations, and build strong relationships with legislators and community members. Here's a brief overview:

### Public speaking and presentation skills

Public speaking and presentation skills help you articulate your district's needs and priorities effectively. Here are some key strategies:



#### Practice Regularly:

Rehearse your speeches and presentations to build confidence.



#### Know Your Audience:

Tailor your message to resonate with your listeners.



#### Use Visual Aids:

Enhance your presentation with clear and engaging visual aids.



#### Engage Your Audience:

Ask questions, invite feedback, and encourage interaction.

For more detailed information on improving your public speaking and presentation skills, download our one-pager which includes:



Tips for preparing and delivering effective speeches.



Strategies for using visual aids to enhance your message.



Techniques for engaging your audience.



Download our guide for [public speaking and presentation skills](#).

## Conflict resolution techniques

Handling conflicts and difficult conversations is a crucial part of your role. Use these techniques to navigate such situations:



### Stay calm and composed:

Keep your emotions in check and remain calm.



### Active listening:

Listen to understand, not just to respond.



### Empathy and respect:

Show empathy and respect for differing viewpoints.



### Find common ground:

Identify shared goals and values to foster collaboration.

Download our conflict resolution techniques guide for a comprehensive guide on conflict resolution techniques, download our detailed resource which includes:



Steps for staying calm and composed during conflicts.



Methods for active listening and showing empathy.



Strategies for finding common ground and resolving disputes.



Download our [guide for conflict resolution techniques](#).

## Active listening and thoughtful responses

Active listening and thoughtful responses are key to effective communication. Here are some strategies:



### Active listening techniques:

Give full attention, show interest, reflect, and paraphrase.



### Thoughtful responses:

Pause before responding, acknowledge points, stay relevant, and be concise.

For detailed techniques on active listening and thoughtful responses, download our guide which includes:



Practices for improving your active listening skills.



Tips for crafting thoughtful and relevant responses.



Exercises to enhance your communication effectiveness.



Download our guide for [active listening and thoughtful responses](#).

## Bullet-point summaries and templates for clear communication

Using bullet-point summaries and templates can help streamline your communication and ensure clarity. Here are some useful tips:



### Keep it concise:

Use bullet points to break down information into easily digestible parts.



### Use templates:

Utilize provided templates for emails, speeches, and reports to maintain consistency and clarity.



### Highlight key points:

Bold or underline key points to draw attention to the most important information.

For a set of useful templates and bullet-point summaries, download our resource which includes:



Templates for emails, phone calls, and in-person meetings.



Bullet-point summaries for legislative updates.



Examples of clear and effective communication materials.



Check out our [communication templates](#)

# ESSENTIAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

## ! In this section...

Gear up with valuable contacts, templates, and digital tools to support your work as a Leg Rep. This section includes a **directory of key networks and contacts**, ensuring you have access to support and information when needed. Additionally, it offers a **legislative calendar** to help you stay on track with key dates and **templates for effective communication with legislators, community members, and stakeholders**. **Leveraging digital tools** like social media and virtual meetings is also covered, with best practices to enhance your advocacy efforts and connect more broadly.

### Key takeaways



- **Key Contacts and Networks:**  
Establishing connections with resources like the WSSDA Strategic Advocacy staff, OSPI, and NSBA gives you a strong support network to access timely information and guidance.
- **Legislative Calendar:**  
Staying informed about key legislative dates, deadlines, and events is essential for planning and effective advocacy.
- **Communication Templates:**  
Email and letter templates, phone scripts, and social media posts provide ready-to-use tools for clear, consistent messaging.
- **Digital Advocacy Tools:**  
Supporting student representatives helps them effectively contribute to board discussions and share insights from the student perspective, fostering a well-rounded advocacy approach.

### Important links and resources



- [!\[\]\(c33cb967c8fc4f5e27188a389b621c8e\_img.jpg\) Washington Legislature Website](#)
- [!\[\]\(38e1383487ca0f0e9e2c9378b9dbcae7\_img.jpg\) National School Boards Association \(NSBA\)](#)
- [!\[\]\(d399648641177ccf0f777d76c74f84ed\_img.jpg\) Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\)](#)
- [!\[\]\(d32727c446c8638ae1599c3d4f46ad10\_img.jpg\) Washington Education Association \(WEA\)](#)
- [!\[\]\(af3a820412cab4640f1b0ff6288cd856\_img.jpg\) Legislative Information Center](#)

# Essential tools and resources

## Key contacts, networks, and additional resources

Building and maintaining a network of key contacts is crucial for legislative representatives (leg reps). This network helps you stay informed, get support, and amplify your advocacy efforts. Below is a directory of important contacts you should have as a leg rep:

### WSSDA Strategic Advocacy Staff

Marissa Rathbone

Director of Strategic Advocacy

[mrathbone@wssda.org](mailto:mrathbone@wssda.org)

### Find Your Legislator

Use the directory on the [Washington Legislature website](#) to connect with your district's legislators.

### WSSDA Leg Rep Network

Join the Leg Rep Network Meeting.  
Access Leg Rep Network recordings [here](#).

### National School Boards Association (NSBA)

Website: <https://www.nsba.org>

Resources: Federal advocacy, policy briefs, and professional development

### Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

Website: <https://www.k12.wa.us>

Resources: Educational data, policy updates, and funding information

### Washington Education Association (WEA)

Website: <https://www.washingtonea.org>

Resources: Professional development, advocacy support, and educational research

### Legislative Information Center

Website: <https://leg.wa.gov/lic/Pages/default.aspx>

Resources: Bill tracking, legislative calendars, and committee information



## Legislative calendar

Understanding the legislative calendar is crucial for effective advocacy. Knowing when the legislative sessions begin, key deadlines, and important events can help you plan and time your advocacy efforts effectively. Here are the key dates for Washington State:



### Regular legislative sessions:

- **Odd-numbered years:** Regular sessions begin on the second Monday in January and last for 105 days.
- **Even-numbered years:** Regular sessions also start on the second Monday in January but last for 60 days.



### Special sessions:

These can be called by the governor or by a two-thirds vote of the Legislature to address specific issues, typically the budget. Special sessions can last no more than 30 days and can occur at any time during the two-year legislative cycle.



### Key deadlines and cutoff dates:

- **Bill introduction deadline:** Typically early in the session..
- **Policy committee cutoff:** Deadline by which bills must pass out of policy committees.
- **Fiscal committee cutoff:** Deadline by which bills must pass out of fiscal committees.
- **House of origin cutoff:** Deadline by which bills must pass out of their house of origin (House or Senate).
- **Opposite House cutoff:** Deadline by which bills must pass out of the opposite house.
- **End of regular session:** Final adjournment, known as "Sine Die".

## Communication templates

Effective communication is key to successful advocacy. Here are templates for emails, phone calls, in-person meetings, sample letters, advocacy materials, and social media posts to help you engage with legislators and the community.

### Email templates for initial contact with legislators

#### Template 1: Introduction and meeting request

**Subject:** Introduction and Request for Meeting

Dear [Legislator's Name],

My name is [Your Name], and I am the legislative representative for [Your School District]. I am writing to introduce myself and discuss important issues affecting our district. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to share our concerns and explore ways we can work together to support our students.

Please let me know a convenient time for you to meet. I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information]

#### Template 2: Follow-up meeting request

**Subject:** Follow-Up on Meeting Request

Dear [Legislator's Name],

I hope this email finds you well. I recently reached out to request a meeting to discuss key issues affecting [Your School District]. I understand you have a busy schedule, but I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information]

### Template 3: Update email

**Subject:** Update on [School District] Initiatives

Dear [Legislator's Name],

I wanted to provide you with an update on some recent developments in [Your School District]. [Briefly describe achievements, ongoing projects, or challenges].

We appreciate your continued support and look forward to working with you to address these important issues.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information]

### Template 4: Invitation to school event

**Subject:** Invitation to Visit [School Name]

Dear [Legislator's Name],

I am writing to invite you to visit [School Name] in [Your School District]. We would be honored to show you firsthand the excellent work being done by our students and staff, as well as discuss the challenges we face.

Your visit would provide valuable insight into our needs and help strengthen our partnership in advocating for better educational policies. Please let me know your availability, and we will arrange a convenient time for your visit.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information]

## Scripts for phone calls and in-person meetings

### Phone call script: Initial contact

"Hello, [Legislator's Name]. This is [Your Name], the legislative representative for [Your School District]. I am calling to introduce myself and request a meeting to discuss some important issues affecting our district. Could we schedule a time that works for you?"

### Phone call script: Follow-up

"Hello, [Legislator's Name]. This is [Your Name] from [Your School District]. I wanted to follow up on our previous meeting request. I understand you have a busy schedule, but I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss key issues at your earliest convenience. Thank you."

### In-Person meeting script: Key points to discuss

- 1. Introduction:** "Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is [Your Name], and I represent [Your School District]."
- 2. Key Issues:** "We are currently facing [specific issues]. These issues are impacting our students and teachers in the following ways [provide examples]."
- 3. Request:** "We need your support in [specific action or policy change]. How can we work together to address these concerns?"
- 4. Conclusion:** "Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to continuing our conversation and finding solutions that benefit our students."

## Sample letters and advocacy materials

### Sample letter: Advocacy for increased funding

Dear [Legislator's Name],

I am writing to express the urgent need for increased funding for [Your School District]. Our schools are facing significant challenges that directly impact our students' learning experiences, including [specific issues such as outdated facilities, lack of resources, etc.].

Increased funding would allow us to [specific solutions such as improve facilities, provide better resources, hire additional staff, etc.]. We respectfully request your support in advocating for these necessary funds.

Thank you for your commitment to education. I look forward to working with you to ensure our students receive the quality education they deserve.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information]

### Template 4: Invitation to school event

[School District Logo]

## Support Our Schools!

### Key Issues:

- [Outdated facilities affecting student learning.]
- [Insufficient resources for classroom activities.]
- [Need for additional staff to reduce class sizes]
- [...]




### Our Request:

- [Increased state funding for school improvements]
- [Support for policies that provide equitable resources for all students.]
- [...]

### Join Us in Advocating for Our Students!

Contact [Your Name] at [Your Contact Information] for more information on how you can help.

## Social media posts

Post Type	Content
<b>General Advocacy</b>	 Advocacy Alert! We're working hard to ensure [Your School District] gets the support it needs. Join us in advocating for better resources and funding for our students. Every voice counts! #SupportOurSchools #EducationMatters
<b>Upcoming Meeting or Event</b>	 Mark Your Calendars! We're hosting a community meeting to discuss important issues facing our schools on [Date] at [Time] in [Location]. Your input is vital. Let's work together for our students' future! #CommunityEngagement #EduAdvocacy
<b>Success Story</b>	 Success! Thanks to our collective advocacy, [specific achievement such as increased funding, new policies, etc.]. Let's keep up the momentum and continue fighting for our students' needs. #AdvocacyWorks #BetterSchoolsBetterFuture

## Leveraging digital tools

In today's digital age, leveraging online platforms is essential for effective advocacy and communication. As a legislative representative, using social media, virtual meetings, and other digital tools can help you connect with your community, share important information, and advocate for your district's needs more efficiently. Here we provide you with the best practices for utilizing these digital tools to enhance your advocacy efforts.

### Using social media for advocacy

Social media platforms offer powerful tools for engaging with your community, sharing updates, and advocating for issues that matter to your district. Here are some best practices to make the most of these platforms:

What you need to do	Objective	What you need to consider
<b>Choose the right platforms</b>	Focus your efforts on platforms where your audience is most active.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Facebook:</b> Ideal for reaching a broad audience, sharing detailed updates, and hosting live events.</li> <li>• <b>X (Twitter):</b> Useful for quick updates, engaging in real-time discussions, and amplifying messages through hashtags.</li> <li>• <b>Instagram:</b> Best for visual storytelling, sharing infographics, and connecting with a younger audience.</li> <li>• <b>LinkedIn:</b> Effective for professional networking and sharing policy-related content with a more formal audience.</li> </ul>
<b>Create engaging content</b>	Post content that resonates with your audience and encourages interaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use visuals:</b> Incorporate images, infographics, and videos to make your posts more appealing and shareable.</li> <li>• <b>Tell stories:</b> Share real-life stories from your district that highlight the impact of your advocacy efforts.</li> <li>• <b>Encourage interaction:</b> Ask questions, create polls, and invite feedback to foster engagement and community involvement.</li> <li>• <b>Consistency is key:</b> Post regularly to keep your audience informed and engaged. Develop a content calendar to plan and schedule your posts.</li> </ul>
<b>Monitor and respond</b>	Engage with your audience by responding to comments, messages, and mentions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Timely responses:</b> Aim to respond to questions or comments promptly to show that you value your audience's input.</li> <li>• <b>Address concerns:</b> Use social media as a platform to address concerns and provide clarifications on important issues.</li> <li>• <b>Track analytics:</b> Use social media analytics tools to monitor the performance of your posts and adjust your strategy accordingly.</li> </ul>



## Best practices for virtual meetings and webinars

Virtual meetings and webinars have become an essential part of communication and advocacy. They allow you to connect with your community, stakeholders, and colleagues efficiently. Here are best practices to ensure your virtual events are effective and engaging:

What you need to do	Objective	What you need to consider
<b>Prepare thoroughly</b>	Ensure that your virtual meeting or webinar runs smoothly and achieves its objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Test technology:</b> Test your internet connection, audio, and video equipment before the event. Familiarize yourself with the platform's features.</li> <li>• <b>Prepare an agenda:</b> Create a clear agenda and share it with participants ahead of time. This helps keep the meeting focused and organized.</li> <li>• <b>Set expectations:</b> Inform participants about the meeting's purpose, duration, and any protocols (e.g., muting microphones, using the chat function).</li> </ul>
<b>Engage participants</b>	Keep your audience engaged and ensure active participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interactive elements:</b> Incorporate polls, Q&amp;A sessions, and breakout rooms to make the event interactive.</li> <li>• <b>Set respectful norms or expectations:</b> Set respectful norms and expectations at the start of a virtual session. This supports smooth facilitation.</li> <li>• <b>Encourage participation:</b> Prompt participants to ask questions, share their thoughts, and contribute to discussions.</li> <li>• <b>Use visual aids:</b> Enhance your presentation with slides, videos, and other visual aids to keep participants interested and focused.</li> </ul>

<b>Facilitate smoothly</b>	<p>Manage the virtual meeting or webinar effectively to ensure it stays on track.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Start on time:</b> Respect your participants' time by starting and ending the meeting as scheduled.</li> <li>• <b>Moderate discussions:</b> Guide discussions to ensure that participation is balanced and everyone has a chance to speak and that the conversation stays on topic.</li> <li>• <b>Record the session:</b> Record the meeting or webinar for those who couldn't attend. Share the recording along with any relevant materials afterward.</li> </ul>
<b>Follow up</b>	<p>Reinforce the event's key points and maintain engagement with participants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Send a summary:</b> After the event, send participants a summary of the key points discussed, along with any action items or next steps.</li> <li>• <b>Gather feedback:</b> Use surveys or follow-up emails to gather feedback on the event. This helps improve future virtual meetings and webinars.</li> <li>• <b>Continue the conversation:</b> Encourage participants to reach out with any further questions or thoughts, keeping the lines of communication open.</li> </ul>

By effectively leveraging digital tools, you can amplify your message, engage more effectively with your community, and advocate for your district's needs in a modern, impactful way.

## EVALUATING PROGRESS

### ! In this section...

Get clarity on **assessing your effectiveness as a Leg Rep**. This section emphasizes the **importance of setting clear goals aligned with your district's priorities**, helping you track achievements and identify areas for improvement. Additionally, it provides **strategies for seeking constructive feedback from board members, colleagues, and community stakeholders**. By regularly evaluating your efforts and incorporating feedback, you can continually refine your advocacy approach and enhance your impact.

### Key takeaways



#### **Goal Setting:**

Establishing measurable, realistic goals aligned with your district's needs allows you to track your progress and stay focused on key priorities.



#### **Feedback for Improvement:**

Regularly seek feedback to understand the impact of your advocacy efforts and identify areas for growth. This fosters a cycle of continuous improvement and strengthens your effectiveness.

# Evaluating progress

As a legislative representative, continually evaluating your progress is essential to ensuring that your advocacy efforts are effective and aligned with your community's needs. This guide will help you set achievable goals, track your progress, seek feedback, and implement continuous improvement strategies.

## Setting goals

Setting clear, realistic, and achievable goals is the foundation of effective advocacy. Goals give direction to your efforts, help you prioritize tasks, and provide a benchmark against which to measure your progress.

Particularly, your advocacy goals should align with your Board goals and goals in your district's Strategic Plan.

## Guidance on setting realistic and achievable advocacy goals

### 01 Understand your role and scope:

Before setting goals, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of the specific responsibilities and powers associated with your role as a leg rep. Your goals should be aligned with what you can realistically influence and accomplish within your position. This toolkit was created to help you understand your role and your scope. We encourage you to revise its contents whenever unclear about them.

### 02 Identify community priorities:

- Engage with your community members to identify their top concerns and needs. This can be done through surveys, town hall meetings, and direct conversations with constituents.
- Use this input to shape your advocacy goals, ensuring that they are relevant to the people you represent.

### 03 Set SMART goals:

SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This framework ensures that your goals are clear and attainable, with defined criteria for measuring success.

- **Specific:** Clearly define what you want to achieve. Instead of a vague goal like "Improve education," specify what aspect of education you aim to improve, such as "Increase access to after-school programs."
- **Measurable:** Determine how you will measure progress.

- **Achievable:** Set goals that are challenging yet attainable. Consider the resources and time available to you.
- **Relevant:** Ensure that your goals align with the broader needs and priorities of your community and your role as a legislative representative.
- **Time-bound:** Set a deadline for achieving your goals.

## 04 Break down goals:

Larger goals can sometimes feel overwhelming. Break them down into smaller, more manageable tasks or milestones. This approach makes it easier to track progress and helps maintain momentum.

## Tools for tracking progress and measuring impact

### 01 Use a goal-setting framework:

Tools like OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) or Gantt charts can help you organize your goals and monitor progress over time. These frameworks provide a structured approach to setting and tracking goals.

- **OKRs:** In this framework, the Objective is your goal, and the Key Results are the measurable outcomes that indicate you are on track to achieving that goal. For example, your Objective might be to ***“Improve community engagement,”*** with Key Results such as ***“Host three town hall meetings”*** and ***“Increase social media engagement by 20%.”***
- **Gantt charts:** These visual timelines can help you plan and track the progress of your goals, especially when they involve multiple steps or stages.

### 02 Create a progress dashboard:

- Develop a simple dashboard using tools like Excel, Google Sheets, or specialized software to regularly track milestones and achievements. A dashboard allows you to see at a glance where you are in the process of achieving your goals.
- Include columns for your goals, key milestones, deadlines, current progress, and any notes or adjustments needed. Regularly update the dashboard to reflect your progress and any changes in your goals or strategies.

### 03 Set regular check-ins:

- Schedule periodic reviews to assess your progress toward your goals. Depending on the scope of your goals, these reviews could be monthly, quarterly, or at another interval that makes sense for your objectives.
- During these check-ins, evaluate what has been accomplished, identify any challenges or obstacles, and adjust your strategies as needed. Regular check-ins keep you accountable and ensure that you are on track to achieving your goals.

## 04 Evaluate impact:

- Measuring the tangible outcomes of your efforts is critical to understanding your effectiveness as a legislative representative. For instance, if your goal was to increase community engagement, track metrics like attendance at events, participation in surveys, or the number of followers on social media.
- Use both qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate impact. Qualitative feedback from community members can provide insights into how your efforts are perceived, while quantitative data can show the extent of your reach and engagement.

## Feedback and improvement

Feedback is an invaluable tool for growth and improvement. By actively seeking input from your community, and fellow leg reps and school directors, you can gain insights into how your efforts are perceived and identify areas for enhancement. Continuous improvement based on feedback is key to long-term success in your role.

## Methods for seeking feedback from the community and peers

### 01 Conduct surveys and polls:

- Regularly surveying your community can provide valuable feedback on your performance, effectiveness, and the relevance of your advocacy efforts. Tools like SurveyMonkey or Google Forms are easy to use and can help you gather input on a wide range of topics.
- Include questions that allow respondents to rate your effectiveness, suggest areas for improvement, and provide open-ended comments. This feedback can help you understand the needs and concerns of your community better.

### 02 Hold feedback sessions:

- Organize town halls, forums, or small group meetings specifically for receiving feedback from your community and peers. Encourage open and honest dialogue, and create a safe space where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.
- These sessions can also serve as an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings, address concerns directly, and demonstrate your commitment to listening and responding to your constituents.

### 03 Peer reviews:

- Engage in peer reviews with other legislative representatives. Share your experiences, challenges, and successes, and seek constructive criticism to improve your approach. WSSDA's Leg Rep Network meetings are the perfect place for this.

- Peer reviews provide a fresh perspective on your work and can offer practical suggestions for overcoming obstacles or enhancing your strategies.

## 04 Monitor social media and public sentiment:

- Track comments and discussions on social media and other public platforms to gauge public opinion and identify areas for improvement. Social media can provide real-time feedback and insights into how your actions and messages are being received.
- Use this feedback to adjust your communication strategies, clarify any misconceptions, and engage more effectively with your audience.

## Continuous improvement strategies based on feedback and experiences

### 01 Analyze feedback:

- After gathering feedback, take the time to analyze it thoroughly. Look for patterns or recurring themes that indicate areas of strength and opportunities for growth.
- Categorize the feedback into actionable items and prioritize them based on their importance and impact.

### 02 Implement changes:

- Based on the feedback, make adjustments to your strategies, goals, or communication methods.
- Implement changes gradually and monitor the impact of these adjustments. Continuous improvement is an ongoing process, and small, incremental changes can lead to significant long-term results.

### 03 Reflect on experiences:

- Regularly reflect on your experiences to learn from both successes and challenges. Consider what strategies worked well, what could be improved, and how you can apply these lessons to future efforts.
- Reflection can be done through journaling, discussions with peers, or simply taking time to think critically about your work. This process helps you internalize your experiences and use them to guide your future actions.

### 04 Seek professional development:

- Engage in ongoing learning through workshops, webinars, or courses focused on areas where you need improvement. Whether it's public speaking, negotiation, policy analysis, or another skill, continuous learning can enhance your effectiveness as a legislative representative.

- Professional development opportunities can also provide new ideas and strategies that you can apply to your work, keeping your approach fresh and innovative.
- WSSDA Leadership Development offers a number of opportunities to engage in Professional Development, such as attending Annual Conference. Your progress and growth in these areas can show up as learning for others or as content for your Board of Distinction applications in the summer.

## 05 Set new goals:

- As you achieve your initial goals, set new ones that build on your progress and address any gaps identified through feedback. This keeps your advocacy work dynamic and responsive to your community's evolving needs.
- Continuously revisiting and updating your goals ensures that your efforts remain relevant and impactful over time.



# Final thoughts



Your role as a leg rep is both challenging and profoundly impactful. As you continue to advocate for the needs and priorities of your community, it's essential to recognize the importance of persistence and dedication. Advocacy is rarely a straight path; it's filled with moments of progress, setbacks, and, ultimately, the satisfaction of knowing that your efforts are contributing to meaningful change.

Success in advocacy often comes to those who are willing to stay the course, even when the results aren't immediately visible. Each step you take, whether it's setting clear goals, seeking feedback, or making continuous improvements, adds to the foundation of long-term progress. The conversations you engage in, the issues you address, and the relationships you build all play a crucial role in driving positive outcomes for your district and your community.

It's important to embrace the challenges that come with your role. Difficult conversations and conflicts are not roadblocks but opportunities to build your understanding and find solutions that resonate with all stakeholders. By approaching these moments with an open mind and a commitment to finding common ground, you can navigate even the most complex situations with grace and effectiveness.

As you continue your work, take pride in the milestones you achieve, no matter how small they may seem. Each achievement is a testament to your dedication and a step closer to the broader goals you've set for your school district. Remember, too, that you're not alone on this journey. The support of your peers, community members, and the resources available through WSSDA are there to guide and uplift you.

If you ever find yourself in need of advice, strategies, or simply someone to discuss your challenges with, please don't hesitate to reach out. The Strategic Advisory Team is here to provide you with the assistance and support you need.

*Your hard work, persistence, and commitment to your district are truly remarkable. Keep pushing forward, knowing that your efforts are making a significant and lasting difference.*

For further assistance, you can contact:

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# Appendices



## [Educational acronyms and terminology](#)

This guide is a handy reference listing the acronyms school directors are most likely to hear.



## [Legislative updates](#)

WSSDA's strategic advocacy team provides regular updates for our members year-round. During the legislative session, subscribers will receive weekly "InSession" emails to supplement their use of WSSDA's [topic briefs](#) and other tools and information. Use both past and upcoming legislative updates to inform your [advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels](#).



## [Parliamentary procedure](#)

This guide introduces board members to the basics of parliamentary procedure found in *Robert's Rules*. It also addresses topics that school boards will most commonly encounter during their meetings.



## [Prioritizing your board's legislative positions](#)

Learn how school boards can prioritize their top legislative positions to guide WSSDA's advocacy efforts for the upcoming legislative session.



## [Public schools funding FAQs](#)

The Washington school funding system is complex, and many previous attempts to explain it are lengthy and time-consuming to read. WSSDA designed this resource to answer some of the most common questions in a simple, accessible, and easy-to-navigate way. Inside this 32-page booklet, you'll find answers to 36 frequently asked questions. The booklet also has colorful, explanatory graphics that you can use as stand-alone resources for distribution.



## [Topic briefs](#)

Here you'll find succinct, ready-to-use points and information on various K-12 education topics with the option to download as handouts.



## [WSSDA Legislative Positions](#)

Legislative positions are WSSDA's call to action on legislative issues, whether at the state or federal level. These positions guide the work of WSSDA staff and those acting on behalf of WSSDA.



## [WSSDA Positions Catalog](#)

Here you can find all positions adopted by school boards voting at an annual event called the WSSDA [General Assembly](#). These positions, together with the [bylaws](#) and [operating policies](#), form the governing foundations of WSSDA. Learn more about [WSSDA positions](#).

