



## **AFSA Legislative Handbook**

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## **Act locally**

It is absolutely essential to establish and maintain a solid relationship with your representatives. Do not wait for a crisis issue to arise before making your initial contact. This will help to ensure that your concerns and the concerns of your members are addressed. It is paramount for every AFSA affiliate to support local candidates who support school leaders, not just those who support increased funding for teacher training, lead teachers, etc.

Seek out candidates who support:

- Ongoing leadership development programs
- Leave time granted to administrators to take courses or engage in study groups;
- Programs that financially support post-graduate and doctoral degree acquisition and
- Salary structures that reward those academic achievements.
- Building strong relationships locally

1. **Research Your State Representative.** By visiting your state legislature's website, you can often find out how your representatives stance on issues are important to you and your members. It is important to know your representative's voting record so you will know how they voted in the past and how they will likely vote in the future (i.e. Labor, vouchers, charter schools, collective bargaining, NCLB, national standards, public education etc.). This information is critical, as you will want to forge and sustain a relationship with a representative that supports your issues to ensure future support.

A new and interesting way to research your state representative is to see what they say on their Twitter or Facebook pages. More often than not, you can get a good sense of their stances of many issues by reading what they post on Facebook and Twitter.

2. **Call Your Representative.** After you have conducted your initial research, you should then call your representative. This seemingly simple step will lay the foundation for your relationship. Introduce yourself and give the representative your name, title, name of your local, your school name, address (home and school) and contact information. Tell him/her how many members are in your local (which is in his/her district) and if appropriate, quickly touch on one or two important issues. It is important to let the representative know that your local is in their district so the representative understands they are talking to people who can vote them in or out of office. If the representative is not available, ask when a good time to call would be, or leave a message.

3. **Follow-up.** Send your representative an email or letter shortly after your phone call. In your letter or email that has a letterhead if available, reiterate your discussion, the name of your local and school, and what issues (if any) you discussed. This is also a good time to send any relevant information related to what you discussed. Invite your representative to speak at your school, a local function, executive board meeting, or at a related business event.

4. **Schedule a Meeting.** When there is an upcoming/ongoing issue, schedule a meeting with your representative. Update them on the issue, your position and give them any other relevant

information. Ask them if they will support/oppose the issue and get a commitment where appropriate. Again, follow up with a letter or an email.

### **How to contact your representatives on urgent legislative matters**

Oftentimes, legislative issues come up for a vote or move (i.e. from committee to the floor for a vote) without much notice. A phone call can be a very effective way to have your voice heard in a timely manner.

Tips for calling your representatives

1. Be Prepared. Before calling your representative, have a few brief talking points ready. If you are calling about a bill, know the bill number, the status of the bill, and your representative's position on the bill (if it is available).
2. It's ok if your representative is not available. Ask for the person who handles the issue at hand, and discuss it with them. They will be able to inform the representative of your position and why it is important to you and your members.
3. Identify Yourself. Give them your name, title, local name, your school and the address of both your home and school.
4. Know the Bill Number. It is very important, when contacting your representatives, to reference a bill number. Doing so demonstrates your knowledge and concern of the issue and increases the likelihood of your call being influential. In addition, this makes the issue easy for staff to look up, track, and update you when necessary.
5. Briefly state your issue, why it is important, and provide supporting facts if you have them. If you don't know it already, ask what your representative's position is. If it is not available, politely ask for a letter in writing when a position is taken.
6. Follow Up. It is important to thank elected officials. Thank them for their time and for supporting your position. If necessary, request a meeting on the issue in this letter.

### **Understanding Legislation**

1. Bill Introduction – A bill may be drafted and given to a member of Congress from several sources, but only the member of Congress can introduce legislation. Once the bill is introduced, they become the sponsor of the legislation.
2. Bill Number – Upon introduction, a bill is assigned a number. In the House, bills are labeled as H.R. \_\_\_\_ and in the Senate as S. \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Committee - After a bill is assigned a number, it is then referred to a committee. The committee it is referred to is dependent upon the nature of the bill – i.e. a bill that relates to the

No Child Left Behind Act would be referred to the Education and Labor Committee in the House, and in the Senate, to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

4. Subcommittee - Once a bill reaches its appropriate committee, it is assigned to the committee calendar. It can then be either considered by the committee as a whole, or referred to a subcommittee for further study, testimony and/or hearings. This process puts on the record the views of experts, agencies, public officials and the general public.

5. Markups - When all hearings and testimony are completed, the subcommittee will either recommend the bill as is to the full committee, or amend (“markup”) the bill.

6. Reporting the Bill - The full committee then decides to accept the subcommittee’s findings and markups, or may conduct further study, hearings and testimony. The full committee will then vote on a bill to the House or Senate, which is called “ordering a bill reported.” For many reasons, a committee may choose not to act on a bill, which is the equivalent of killing the bill.

7. Writing Report - Once reported to the House or Senate, the chair of the committee will instruct staff to provide a written report of the bill. This report will include a description of the legislation’s intent, its impact on existing laws and programs, the position of the executive branch, and the views of any dissenting committee members.

8. Bill Calendar - A bill will then receive a place on the House or Senate calendar in chronological order. The Speaker of the House and Majority Leader of the Senate decide what order bills come up for a vote on the calendar. A bill will then be debated, with possible floor amendments added, and finally voted on in the House or Senate.

9. Conference Report - When a bill passes either chamber (House or Senate) it is referred to the other chamber and follows the same process through committee. If minor changes are made to the legislation, it is common that the bill will be sent back to the original chamber and a conference committee from both the House and Senate will work to come to an agreement. A conference report will then be generated and sent to both Houses.

10. Final Action – once the bill has been approved in final form, it is then sent to the President for signature. The President has the options to either sign it into law, take no action for ten days while Congress is in session and it automatically becomes law, veto it, or take no action while Congress has adjourned for its second session and the legislation dies – known as a “pocket veto”.

11. Overriding a Veto – Congress can override a Presidential veto, with a two-thirds vote in the House and Senate.

### **Get involved**

Lobbying is an important and necessary step in the legislative process. It is an effective tool for AFSA members to have their voices heard and to contribute valued input to members of Congress.

Before contacting a member of Congress it is important to know some basic principles of the legislative process. By gaining a better understanding of how Congress works, you will be better equipped to influence the legislative process.

### **Who To Contact**

Chief of Staff (CoS) or Administrative Assistant:

Reports directly to and often “has the ear of the member”. The CoS is often the political advisor to the member and also usually the office manager.

Scheduler/Secretary (Appointments/Personal):

Is charged with the responsibility of handling all aspects of the member’s schedule. This person is often referred to as the “gatekeeper” to the member and coordinates who the member will/will not see, constituent visits, speaking arrangements/commitments, media appearances etc. If you want to arrange a meeting with the member, ask to speak to the scheduler. It is a good idea to be on friendly terms with the representatives schedulers as they will decide if you can have a meeting with the representative or not.

Legislative Director (LD):

This is the staff member that monitors the member’s legislation and will make recommendations/advise the legislator on the pros and cons of a particular piece of legislation or issue. They also oversee the LA’s (legislative assistants) and may sometimes draft legislation.

Legislative Assistant:

Each office has several LA’s. Each LA has a particular area of expertise, i.e. education, labor, health. They may sometimes draft legislation for the member and act as a conduit to the White House, Federal Agencies, lobbyists and special interest groups. They monitor legislation and report to the LD on pending legislation. Committees and subcommittees have their own legislative assistants, assigned directly to that committee, and it can be very useful to talk to them, as they specialize in a particular committee.

Communications Director or Press Secretary:

The CD’s responsibility is to handle all media activities – i.e. news conferences, write media releases, cultivate relationships with the media (build and maintain), answer media questions, and prep the member on the correct answers for media interviews. The Press Secretary is expected to know all aspects of print and electronic media and how to promote a positive image of the legislator on issues efficiently.

Caseworker:

Works with the legislator’s constituents, often out of the district office, to help resolve problems related to federal agencies – i.e. Social Security, Medicare. They often will prepare constituent letters for the legislator to sign.

District Staff:

Legislators have one or more offices in the district they represent, with a few staff members. It is usually easier to get an appointment with this office and requires less travel.

## Speak out

Letters, e-mails and faxes can be a very effective way of contacting a legislator and expressing your views on an issue. It is a great tool for keeping in touch with legislators and their offices, and keeping your views/ agenda on the front burner, especially if a physical meeting is not possible. When sending your letter or email, consider the status of the issue as this may affect who the letter is addressed to. Note that sending an email is much quicker than mailing a letter. If possible, use emails in correspondence with the legislator and their staff. You will get faster replies back.

### Tips for writing an effective letter or email

1. Date the Letter - Offices will often have an amount of time or leeway that is acceptable to respond to a letter. If it is not dated, you may not even get a response.
2. Address Members of Congress Correctly - Begin your letter “Dear Senator (last name)” or “Dear Representative (last name).” NOTE – When writing the Chair of a particular Committee or the Speaker of the House, write “Dear Chairman (last name)” or “Dear Speaker (last name).”
3. Identify Yourself - It is beneficial to identify your AFSA Local name and number as it will add weight to your letter (especially if it can be on letterhead). It is also helpful to point out if you are a constituent or where you work – i.e. “I am contacting you today as a principal at xxx high school located in your district.”
4. Get to the Point - Your introduction should be followed by a **brief** description of your issue. If it is legislative, identify the bill – i.e. H.R. \_\_\_\_ or S. \_\_\_\_\_. Legislators do not want to read long-winded letters and emails. Keep it brief and to the point. It is encouraged to give support to your position and provide specific reasons. Giving a concise explanation, with strong supporting points on ONE issue, is much more effective than a “laundry list” of requests. It is also very helpful to relate your letter (where possible) to the legislator’s district i.e. include specific facts about how a bill will impact principals in the legislator’s district.
5. Personalize - your letter where possible. Bulk form letters are often disregarded as irrelevant. That is where discussing your local is important. Being a member of AFSA is unique and will be different than other letters the representative will get.
- 5A. Be Courteous: Do NOT be rude. If you have a disagreement with how the legislator voted on a certain issue, politely tell them why you believe they were wrong. Do not use inappropriate language. Politeness can go a long way and can help in developing relationships.
6. Conclusion - Finish your letter by thanking the legislator for their work, and sign it. BE SURE to leave your full address. Letters without addresses will be thrown out, and may be blocked by e-mail filtering programs.
7. Follow Up - Where appropriate, state in your letter that you will follow up with a phone call.
8. E-mail - All of the aforementioned rules apply. Do not use informal language and be sure to include your full address. E-mail can be a very timely tool and is seeing increasing use in member offices.

## Address Your Letter Properly

Senate

The Honorable (full name),

Rm # \_\_\_\_\_ (name of)

Senate Office Building

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

House of Representatives

The Honorable (full name),

Rm # \_\_\_\_\_ (name of)

House Office Building

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Meeting in person with legislators and maintaining a relationship with their staff is perhaps the most effective way to ensure the interests and concerns of school administrators are heard.

### **Tips for a Successful meeting**

1. Schedule an Appointment in Advance – Although legislative offices are open to the public, they are extremely busy. To avoid long delays or not getting a meeting at all, make an appointment in advance. Do not be discouraged if your meeting is with a Legislative Assistant. LA's specialize in specific areas and often know more about issues than the legislator does! So, if the purpose of your meeting is to discuss concerns over No Child Left Behind, it can be very beneficial to meet with the LA who specializes in education.
2. Know the Issue – Legislators handle numerous issues on a daily basis. Do not assume they know everything about your specific issue. It is important to provide a few key facts that clearly describe the issue and reasons for your position.
3. Define your Goals – Make sure you know beforehand what key points you want to get across, and what goals you want to accomplish. Stick to one or two issues per meeting, rather than a “laundry list” of requests. Where possible, get a commitment from the legislator – i.e. to support or oppose a bill.
4. Relate it to “home” – Providing examples and facts that relate to the legislator's district can be extremely effective – i.e. if NCLB is not reformed, your district will have x amount of schools without a principal.
5. Know Opposing Views – By having a better understanding of the opposing side of your argument, you will be that much more effective in presenting your views.
6. Leave Materials – Leave behind a few short pieces of information, especially when meeting with the Legislative Assistant. LA's will often use this as a resource and it will keep your meeting/issues/organization fresh in their minds. It is always helpful to leave your contact information in the form of a business card.
7. Follow up – Send a brief thank you note, to not only thank the legislator for their time, but

to reiterate what was discussed and any commitments made. This will also help to sustain the relationship.

### **Quick Tips: Important checklist for building effective relationships with your local legislators**

- Get to KNOW your local politicians by name and they get to know YOU.
- Attend as many local political functions as possible.
- Attend Board of Education/Town Council meetings. If you live in the community, SPEAK out at these meetings. Be known as a community activist and advocate for children and schools.
- Establish credibility in your community, with your board, town council, PTA, community organizations – this is hard work but very necessary – you must be KNOWN and RESPECTED as a professional within the community.
- Support local initiatives that affect your community.
- Write editorials in your local/state newspapers.
- Invite local politicians to your meetings/socials – they LOVE P.R. Events!
- Sponsor fundraiser events for the candidates and support their causes if they are in line with your views.
- Go door-to-door for them/make community connections for your local representatives.
- Write articles of support for the candidates.
- Attend victory parties – get photo ops as often as possible, and distribute to your membership/community.
- Follow local politicians, candidates, school board, city council and respected members of the community on Twitter and Facebook. It shows that you (and as such, your AFSA local) is interested in what they are saying.

### **Quick Tips: Important checklist for building effective relationships with your State Legislators**

- KNOW your state Representatives (especially the ones from YOUR personal community).
- Get to know KEY legislative players (i.e. Speaker of the House/Senate President/Majority and Minority Leaders).
- Establish a state PAC Fund, and sponsor fundraisers for supportive candidates.

- Invite them to your local/statewide functions (i.e. Conventions, leadership conferences, President Dinner Meetings etc.).
- Secure a lobbyist – they are a most valuable asset in the legislative process, they open doors and have strong and credible working relationships with legislators – where possible, try to engage lobbyists that have a working relationship/ties to the Governor and key legislative personnel.
- Arrange meetings with Committee Chairs and Committee members and discuss your concerns with them.
- Hold organizational breakfasts/luncheons/dinners as fundraisers for legislators during nonlegislative/session times.
- Host a “School Administrator Day” at the Capitol – coordinate with allied groups in holding these events if necessary – Use your coalition sponsors as well.
- Give legislative testimony – be specific and praise them as much as possible for their support of favorable legislation.
- Support as many bills as possible in conjunction with other organizations that share similar positions.
- Establish solid COALITIONS that can assist you greatly in the legislative process.
- Join the State AFL-CIO Organization and get on their leadership committee – Be visible and engaging in state AFL-CIO issues.
- KNOW the state AFL-CIO President and Executive Officers and invite them to your functions.
- Have YOUR members understand the importance of the AFL-CIO connection as it affects your members/organization.
- Attend State Democratic/Republican central committee functions – Support the party of choice.
- Know the Party Chairpersons – They should know you by name and face.
- Write them with your disappointments when they are unable to support your position.

**Quick Tips: important checklist for building effective relationships with your Federal Legislators**

- Continue with Local and State practices, but at the national level.
- Support the AFSA-PAC.

- Should the AFSA national encourage you to contact your federal and/or state representatives, follow through with the calls and contacts – It is VERY IMPORTANT that you do so.
- When back in the district, invite them to your functions – They LOVE the P.R.!
- Get the photo op's in the local press – they love it too! Send the Rep a copy, as well as a letter of thanks.
- Keep constant communications ongoing with your congressional delegation
- If the member of Congress resides in your school district, invite him/her repeatedly to your schools and get the press there as well.
- Give the member of Congress school citations, recognize them for their great work on behalf of education and labor.
- Invite local/state politicians to the functions when you have a congressional person at your school – Great connections that help to reinforce your state/local political connections – This TRIFECTA impact gives everyone a moment “in the sun” – You are putting on the event anyway, so invite them all and everybody wins!

### Sample letters

On the following pages you will find several sample letters regarding current issues important to AFSA members. Send these letters and use them as a tool to mobilize your members. These letters can also be useful as a guide for future letter writing campaigns.

#### Collective Bargaining Sample Letter

Date  
 Representative  
 Address  
 City, State Zip

Dear Representative:

I am contacting you today regarding (bill number), which threatens to eliminate or significantly reduce the working rights of school administrators in your district, and across the state. As President/a member of (local name and number), I am adamantly opposed to this measure. The text of this proposed legislation is a direct assault on our local's right to union representation. (Bill number) would essentially eliminate choice and the right to collective bargaining for thousands of (state you live/work in) school leaders.

This bill is an unwarranted attack on public school employees who dedicate their lives and careers to their school children and their respective communities. At this time of extraordinary pressure of meeting higher standards, we desperately need the support of you and your colleagues to foster successful schools, not threats to collective bargaining rights.

As a school leader and your constituent, I thank you for not indulging in negative labor practices and for allowing dedicated professionals who choose to be members of unions to achieve excellence in education.

Sincerely,

Name  
Address

Sample Education Funding Letter

Date  
Representative  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Representative:

I am contacting you today in strong support of increased education funding in this year's state budget. As President/a member of (Local name and number), this issue is of the utmost important to me/me and my members.

Increased funding is urgently needed to provide long overdue increases for rapidly growing education needs. At this time of extraordinary pressure to meet higher standards, we as school leaders must be equipped with the necessary resources to create successful school environments that enable our children to excel.

As I know you are aware, investing in education now will more than pay for itself by increasing earnings and tax revenues, and generating the knowledge and innovation that spark economic growth. Furthermore, it will significantly reduce the incidence of costly social issues in our state, such as unemployment, poverty and crime.

As a school leader and your constituent, the quality of public education is my top priority, and should be yours too. Thank you in advance for your commitment to increased education funding in this year's state budget.

Sincerely,

Name  
Address

## Sample Voucher Letter

Date  
Representative  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Representative:

I am contacting you today as an advocate for public education in strong opposition to school vouchers. As President/a member of (Local name and number) this is a matter of grave importance to me.

Even though the research demonstrates that the public does not support vouchers and they are inherently destructive to public schools, taxpayer monies are still being diverted to pay for private schools. Many of the schools in your district are in large, urban areas and are badly in need of funding to provide the fundamental tools for learning that many of the affluent districts already enjoy. Cutting funds from public schools is not the solution to this serious problem.

Public schools are accountable to the citizens and communities they serve and are subject to the laws of the land. Private schools are accountable to no one and are not subject to the same laws as public schools. At this time of extraordinary pressure of meeting higher standards, I urge you and your colleagues to increase funding for public education, not support taxpayer-subsidized privatization of public education.

As a school leader and your constituent, I thank you for your past and continued support of public education. With the commitment of you and your colleagues, we can all ensure that every child – regardless of race, income, or special needs, receives a quality education.

Sincerely,

Name  
Address

## Sample NCLB Letter

Date  
Congressman  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Congressman:

I am contacting you today regarding the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). As a school administrator and President/a member of (Local name and number), this issue is of critical importance to me.

Although the goals of NCLB are certainly laudable, the means to achieve those goals are fundamentally flawed. NCLB must be drastically modified before it is reauthorized. Significant changes must be made to enhance and improve professional development for school administrators, family involvement, accountability, assessments, pre-school and funding. I have enclosed a specific summary of these six issues of importance for your review.

NCLB must shift its emphasis from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement. Not all schools are created equal and must be given credit for making improvements, rather than punished.

As a school leader and your constituent, the quality of public education in this country is important to me and to the future of our country. It is time to be serious about our commitment to every child—regardless of race, income, or special needs.

Thank you,

Name

Address

Enclosure

### **Enclosure for NCLB Letter**

Top Six Revisions Needed for No Child Left Behind and Why they are Important to School Administrators

#### 1. Professional Development

The Federal Government must set aside at least 20 percent of Title I funds exclusively for professional development. Professional development for administrators and supervisory staffs has long been overlooked. If school administrators are to compensate for all of the factors facing our children and schools, they must be equipped with the necessary tools and supported in the work that they have been called upon to do. Administrators must receive an equal or greater amount of professional development than teachers, as administrators are held accountable for student achievement and school progress.

The amount of funding currently allocated to support professional development programs must be substantially increased to include school administrators. Professional development must also be redirected to meet the individual and systematic needs to improve school performance and encourage post-graduate programs, in collaboration with universities and school systems, as incentives to retain and improve the performance of school leaders.

#### 2. Family Involvement

In order to implement effective programs of parent involvement, parenting/family skills, and adult mentoring, the law must dramatically increase the funding allocated for parent involvement from one percent to five percent of Title I funds.

Schools cannot be the only ones held responsible and accountable for each child's education and progress. A key means for dramatically improving student achievement is to enhance family support for student learning at home and at school. Schools and districts must be afforded linkages to social workers, bilingual staff, and collaboration with community health based organizations and immigrations services, to build parent involvement and assist parents to partner more easily and readily with the school to support their children's academic progress. Specific resources must be allocated to incorporate parents of students with special needs into the mainstream parent community.

It is well documented that schools with high quality, structured parent/family involvement programs yield better grades, higher test scores and higher graduation rates, and decreased drug and alcohol use and violent behavior. Moreover, family involvement programs are linked to higher teacher and administrator morale and increased job satisfaction.

### 3. Accountability

Eliminate NCLB's sanctions and punitive measures, such as narrowing curriculum and instruction to focus on test preparation (teaching to the test), rather than richer academic learning; over-emphasizing standardized tests; over-identifying schools in need of improvement; and using sanctions that do not help or improve schools.

The law's emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failure to raise test scores to enabling schools, districts and states to focus on implementing the key changes needed throughout the educational system to improve teaching and learning. These schools must receive resources and support. Punishments such as school takeover and the disciplining of school administrators do not raise student achievement nor close the achievement gap. Measures must be put in place to ascertain the reason schools are not reaching AYP and the proper resources must be applied to address those specific needs.

### 4. Assessments

Assessments must:

- Be aligned with state content and achievement standards;
- Be used for purposes for which they are valid and reliable;
- Be consistent with nationally recognized professional and technical standards;
- Be of adequate technical quality for each purpose required under the Act;
- Include samples of student work;
- Provide multiple, up-to-date measures of student performance including measures that assess higher order thinking skills and understanding and not be based solely on test scores; and
- Provide useful diagnostic information to improve teaching and learning.

## 5. Pre-School

Although the federal government funds Head Start programs and supports pre-school programs for 3-5 year olds, there is a universal need to assess the quality of day-care programs that are available to high need families. It is incumbent that within NCLB we fund early supervised educational day-care programs for families that qualify.

## 6. Adequate Federal Funding

The federal government must contribute 50 percent of the cost of carrying out the required systemic changes in Title I schools nationwide beyond the costs covered by 20 percent for professional development for teachers and school supervisors and five percent for family involvement. This increase in funding must not come at the expense of other education programs.

### **Sample Thank you letter: Collective Bargaining**

Date

Representative

Address

City, State Zip

Dear Representative:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for meeting with me on (date) to discuss my concerns with (bill number).

As President/a member of (local name and number) I am adamantly opposed to this measure, which seeks to eliminate or significantly reduce the working rights of school administrators in your district. I was pleased to gain your input on this issue and to learn that you will not be supporting such a measure.

Thank you again for your past and continued support of issues important to school administrators. I will be certain to inform my members/colleagues of your position.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

Sample Thank you letter – Education Funding

Date  
Representative  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Representative:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for meeting with me on (date) to discuss the need for increased education funding in this year's state budget.

As President/a member of (local name and number), I can assure you that an increase in education funding is desperately needed by school administrators in your district. I was pleased to hear your commitment to advocate for education funding, and to share the need for an increased investment in education with your colleagues.

As a school leader and your constituent, I was very pleased to hear education funding will be your top priority throughout the budget process. I will be certain to share your position with my members/colleagues.

Sincerely,  
Name  
Address

Sample Thank you letter – vouchers

Date  
Representative  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Representative:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for meeting with me on (date) to discuss my strong opposition to the current school vouchers initiative.

As President/a member of (local name and number), I know you are aware of how important public school education is to me/me and my members. As we discussed, the research demonstrates that the public does not support vouchers, they are inherently destructive to public schools and taxpayer monies are being diverted to pay for private schools. I appreciated your understanding of this problem, and the need to oppose such measures, especially given that many of the public schools in your district are in large, urban areas and are in desperate need of increased funding.

Thank you again for your time and commitment to public schools. With the support of you and your colleagues we can ensure that every child will receive a quality education.

Sincerely,

Name  
Address

Sample Thank you letter – NCLB

Date  
Congressman  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Congressman:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for meeting with me on (date) to discuss the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

As President/a member of (local name and number) the reauthorization of NCLB is of the utmost importance to me/me and my members. As we discussed, we all agree that the goals of NCLB are very worthy, but the means to achieve those goals are flawed. NCLB must be drastically modified before it is reauthorized. Per our discussion, I am including with this letter, a specific summary of six issues of critical importance to school administrators in your district.

Thank you again for meeting with me, and for your past and continued support of public education. I will be certain to inform my members of your support of our proposals.

Sincerely,

Name  
Address  
Enclosure

Sample Thank you letter – Staff

Date  
Staff person's name  
Staff person's title, Representative's name  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Salutation/Last name:

I was very pleased to meet with you on (date) to discuss the importance of (issue). Your understanding and input on (issue) was greatly valued and appreciated.

As President/a member of (local name and number) I care deeply about (issue) and assure you that the school administrators in (Representative's name) district do as well. Per our discussion, I thank you for sharing the details of our meeting with (Representative's name), and for his/her anticipated support. I am available to discuss (issue) in person with (Representative's name) if he/she needs any further information.

Thank you again for our meeting and for your genuine interest in (issue). Please inform (Representative name) that I appreciate his/her past and continued support of public education.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

### **Legislative lingo**

There are many terms and slang that people around Capitol Hill use daily. It is helpful to become familiar with some of this jargon, as it may be relevant when contacting a member of Congress and it shows that you know what you are talking about and will be taken more seriously by the member and their staff.

Act – A bill that has been approved previously by the House or the Senate.

Appropriation – A formal Congressional approval to fund a particular program with specific dollar amounts. i.e. writing a check to pay a bill.

Authorization – Legislation that creates or extends a program, and determines the maximum amount of money that can be spent, or a target for spending – although no money can be spent until after a formal appropriations process.

Bill – A piece of legislation. A bill that is identical in both the House and Senate is referred to as a companion bill.

Budget Authority – The amount of spending authority that Congress allots to federal agencies.

Calendar – The official schedule on the floor of the Senate and House.

Chairman - The presiding officer of a committee or subcommittee. In the Senate, chairmanship is based on seniority of committee tenure, but a Senator may not chair more than one standing committee.

Cloture – Term is only used in the Senate – a rule that limits debates on the Senate floor to 100 hours. It must be agreed to by three-fifths of members.

Continuing Resolution – An appropriations measure that provides funding for an authorized program, to ensure uninterrupted service when a regular appropriations bill has not passed.

Fiscal Year – The Federal government appropriates funds for a fiscal year, which is October 1 – September 30.

Fillibuster - Informal term describing tactics that block or delay Senate action on a bill or other matter by debating it at length, by offering numerous procedural motions, or by any other delaying or obstructive actions.

Germane – A House rule that all amendments to a piece of legislation must be relevant to the bill.

Joint Committee - Committees including membership from both houses of Congress. Joint committees are usually established with narrow jurisdictions and normally lack authority to report legislation. Chairmanship usually alternates between the House and Senate members from Congress to Congress.

Quorum - The minimum number of legislators required to be present to conduct official business – 218 in the House and 51 in the Senate.

Ranking Member - The most senior member of the majority in a committee, next to the chairperson.

Ranking Minority Member - The most senior member of a committee in the minority.

Session - The period during which Congress assembles and carries on its regular business. Each Congress generally has two regular sessions (a first session and a second session), based on the constitutional mandate that Congress assemble at least once each year.

Whip - Member of Congress appointed by the leadership in each house to assist in the legislative agenda and to monitor support/opposition on controversial legislative measures among legislators.

## **Be Heard: Political Action Committees**

### Building a Powerful Voice At Your Local, State and National Level

In order for you and your members to be truly heard in the legislative process, you must form an active State/Local Political Action Committee (PAC). PACs are an essential component of the legislative process and will enable you to help elect candidates that support your priorities.

By forming a PAC you and your members will be able to:

- Elect and retain legislators who are friends to public education and labor.
- Build strong alliances with key legislators in your state government.
- Cultivate and maintain an ongoing relationship with key representatives.
- Invite representatives to PAC fundraisers and introduce them to your members.
- Gain access to legislators at their receptions and fundraisers.
- Enhance your legislative and lobbying efforts effectively.

- Provide legislators with your unique knowledge on important legislative issues.

Each state has their own specific campaign finance laws, but generally, forming a PAC takes only a few simple steps:

1. Go to your Secretary of State's or Board of Elections Office
2. Fill out a Political Action Committee application form
3. Follow your State's guidelines carefully (i.e. reporting , record keeping etc .)

It is critically important that you know your State's fundraising guidelines.

Failure to abide by your state's laws can result in serious penalties. Use a lawyer if needed. You can find a summary of each state's Campaign Finance Laws by visiting:  
<http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/cfl/cfl02/cfl02.shtml>

Finally, It is important that you coordinate your PAC efforts with your State American Federations of Labor and Central Labor Councils. There is great strength in numbers, and working together at the local level will more effectively influence your representatives.

## **AFSA PAC**

We elect our bosses don't we? When there are federal matters that pertain to you, the AFSA PAC is the vehicle through which we can all do just that.

AFSA members report to elected and appointed officials, and therefore must have a strong political action program. We must support candidates and legislators who stand up for quality public schools, and the tools educators need to provide America's youth with the highest quality public education possible.

## **Get Affiliated**

It is critically important that AFSA local members become affiliated with their Central Labor Councils (CLC) and State Federations of Labor. These organizations provide valuable resources to school administrators that will help us all achieve our goals and strengthen our collective voice.

CLCs have many local union affiliates and members that they fight for every day. They speak for many with a powerful voice that carries clout in legislative and political matters. When they speak in solidarity, influential people listen.

CLCs can help fight with us when threats of reorganizing, restructuring, privatization, vouchers, and budget crisis arise or when harmful legislation is being considered.

As a member of AFSA, you have the right and the privilege to work with your State Federations of Labor and community CLCs. If you are not already a member, become one today – it's easy! Just visit: [www.aflcio.org/aboutus/unioncities](http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/unioncities) and search for your state or call the AFL-CIO Office of State and Local Affiliates at (202) 637-5280.

It is imperative that the voice of school administrators be heard in all matters affecting us, and by becoming active in your State Federations of Labor and CLCs, we will be heard!