



**PARENTS UNITED**  
FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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**Minnesota**  
**PTA**  
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## Legislators in the Schools

**Cosponsored by  
Parents United & Minnesota PTA**

**[www.parentsunited.org](http://www.parentsunited.org)  
[www.mnpta.org](http://www.mnpta.org)**

### Introduction

Parents United and the Minnesota PTA are working together to bring legislators into Minnesota's public schools, with parents as their hosts.

The aim of this effort is to show our legislators the wonderful things that are happening in our children's schools, as well as the challenges that our schools face. We also want to get their commitment to work with us in renewed efforts to improve our public schools.

We are focusing on the **January-February** timeframe as the "Legislators in the Schools" weeks. Parents will host a legislator at their child's school for a two- to three-hour time period. The goal is to familiarize legislators with particular schools and, even more important, encourage parents to get to know their legislators. This is a critically important step in strengthening support at the legislature for our public schools.

Consider this a first or continuing step in developing a long-term relationship with your legislators.

Please keep in touch with us and let us know if you have questions or want additional information:

Parents United for Public Schools

Phone: 651-214-6565 (Mary Cecconi)

E-mail: [mary@parentsunited.org](mailto:mary@parentsunited.org)



## Setting Up the Visit

### How do I get started?

- Unless you prefer to work alone on this event, solicit support from a few other parents to plan and carry out the event; if your school has a parent group, this would be a natural place to tap interest and support. (If you don't know of parents to contact, ask your school's principal for names of parents who s/he thinks might be interested in being involved.)
- Call the principal of the school where you'd like to host your legislator. Tell them about the legislators in the schools project and ask them to suggest some good times for the visit in the January – February time frame. Tell them that parents will host the legislator, but you will work closely with the principal and other staff to have a positive experience and pose the least disruption to the school day. You may want to ask your principal (or superintendent) if there is a particular legislator they suggest you invite. (Note: Principals should have received notice of this event through the newsletters of their principals' associations.)
- When you have the suggested times from your school principal, take a look at the different legislators for your school district to decide who to invite. Call the legislator to tell them about the project, offer some possible times for visiting the school, and ask which of those would work best for them. Treat this as an invitation: legislators, overwhelmingly, react positively to invitations from their constituents to become more familiar with important issues.

Another Option: If your legislator has been a strong ally of your schools, ask your legislator to invite a colleague who represents a district different from yours (rural-suburban-urban) to visit your school along with a parent from h/her district. Also offer to accompany your legislator on visit to a school in that district in the spirit of mutual exchange.

- If the first legislator you contact can't make it, call the next one on your list.
- Inform the school principal of the date and time the legislator will visit.
- Fill out the enclosed form, giving the information about your legislators visit and return it to Parents United.

### Tips for Setting Up a Legislator Visit

- If you need contact information for your legislators, you can find it through the Parents United Website, [www.parentsunited.org](http://www.parentsunited.org) – under “Get Involved,” click on the tab “Who to Contact.”
- Start by scheduling just one legislator for your school; different schools, ideally with different parent volunteers, can host other legislators.
- Each legislator may have many schools that s/he represents; recognize that a legislator may need to limit the number of schools s/he visits during the **January – February** time frame, but do encourage them to come to your school; let them know how much it would mean to you to have them visit.



## Planning the Visit

I've set the date with the legislator and the school – now what?

**Decide the issues:** What are three key successes at your school and three key challenges, particularly those exacerbated by district budget cuts? Plan to share these with your legislator. Your school principal or other staff can help you identify and focus on these issues, but remember that your own stories are especially important.

Possible examples of successes:

- A reading program bringing kids up to grade level.
- Community and parental involvement in the school.
- A math lab that is improving achievement.
- A challenging curriculum integrated with the arts.
- Student newspapers, newsletters or especially engaging projects.
- Art and music projects that highlight the gifts and/or cultures of the students.
- Student community service projects.

Possible examples of challenges:

- Crowded classrooms.
- Declining enrollment.
- Difficulty with funding transportation.
- High cost of student activity and athletic fees.
- Diversion of resources to NCLB testing or compliance.
- Insufficient services to children and families living in poverty.
- Loss of ELL staff.
- Loss of or limitations on special programs, such as gifted and talented, fine arts or world languages.

**Prepare a small packet** of information for your legislator about your school and/or district. This can be as simple as a brochure or school newsletter, or it may be more comprehensive. If your district can offer you more information, or if you have a parent in your organizing group who would like to work on this, here are some possibilities:

- Comparative data – year-to-year comparisons of enrollment, heating and transportation costs, health care costs, classroom expenses, etc.
- An outline detailing the effects of current budget cuts.
- Anticipated future cuts and/or concerns about how education is funded.
- Hopes and dreams, e.g., school buildings that can physically accommodate the number of students.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – Report on the current effects of NCLB on your school and how the next phase will affect your school.

**Plan the time:** Assume a two- to three-hour visit.

Depending on the time of day you have set aside for the visit, decide what you'd like to do with your legislator. Plan to begin the day by spending a little time (10-20 minutes, depending on your comfort level) with the legislator in a gathering place where you won't be interrupted. This will allow for introductions and outlining the planned activities for the day. Sitting down with a cup of coffee can create a relaxed and cordial atmosphere to begin the day.

Suggestions of possible activities for the rest of the visit:

- Share a meal with children in the cafeteria. If lots of kids eat breakfast at your school, that would be a nice start. If lunch fits the schedule better, do that.
- Visit a classroom; have the legislator read a book to the class or participate in a math or social studies lesson; a short presentation by a class on a particular culture they've been studying or that is represented in their classroom could be informative.
- Stop by an ELL, special education or reading session to observe the work students are doing.
- Participate in a short student assembly or gym class.
- Give students an opportunity to ask questions of the legislator, perhaps for the school paper.
- Create a collection of photographs of students and school activities which can be given to the legislator and compile a duplicate collection of the photographs for a display at the school.

Plan on having some time (10-30 minutes) at the end of the visit for parent hosts to sit down with the legislator, perhaps in the school library/media center, to wrap up the day. This will give parents an opportunity to clarify any concerns they have, and to answer any questions from the legislator. This will also provide an opportunity to discuss a follow-up plan for further communication.

You might find that a 1½-hour visit is more comfortable for you than a 3-hour visit. That's fine. Plan the time in a way that you think will be enjoyable for the legislator and the parent hosts, and that will convey the important things you feel s/he should know about your school. The amount of time they spend at the school is less important than everyone having as positive a day as possible.

**Send a letter** to the legislator confirming the date and time. Thank them for their willingness to spend their time with your school and give any directions they will need: where the school is, where you will meet them, the names of their parent hosts, the time frame for the day, etc.



## The Visit

- Greet the legislator and thank them for their time. Be respectful but informal. You are sharing this time with them – make it as personal as possible.
- Have the parent hosts and the legislator gather in the place you have arranged for introductions and a cup of coffee. Providing something to eat may also help everyone feel more relaxed. After introductions, briefly outline the group's activities and objectives for the day.
- Follow your schedule for the visit and use the time at a meal or between events to point out successes and challenges of your school – art or history projects in the halls, an intervention program that has been particularly effective, the academic and economic diversity of your school population, etc.
- Tell your stories.
- End with a meeting with the legislator and the parent hosts to wrap up. Does the legislator have any questions parents can answer (or find out the answers)? What did they think of the school? Have parents ask what the legislator thinks s/he can do to address challenges. Pose the issues as problems to be solved and help legislators feel they are part of the solution.

### Tips for Interacting with Your Legislator

- Be friendly, sincere and informal. Be appreciative of their time.
- Be familiar with your legislator's viewpoints so you know what to expect and can politely challenge their arguments, if needed. (Parents United can help you with this information, if you need that.)
- If you disagree with your legislator, say so, but continue to be friendly, so you leave the way open for future conversations.
- If you don't have an answer to a question, just say so. Assure them you will find the answer and get back to them (you can do this in a follow-up phone call or in your thank-you letter).

## Follow-Up

- Send a thank-you note to the legislator who visited. Answer any questions they had that you weren't able to answer during their visit. Include the names and contact information (address, phone, e-mail address) of the parents who hosted. Let the legislator know you will stay in touch throughout the legislative session.
- Report to the parents in your school, through the school newsletter and/or through parent meetings, about the legislator visit. Let them know what issues you covered with the legislator and how s/he responded. Ask for their ideas for future events and give them opportunity to express concerns they have.
- This is a first or continuing step in building a relationship with your legislator: Stay in touch. Use your new relationship. Send your legislators letters, e-mails – or call them – and let them know how you think they are doing in supporting our children. In short, hold them accountable! Let them know you'd like to have them visit next year so they can see how their actions have improved the schools.
- Consider forming a citizen committee to stay in touch with the legislators representing your school district.

### General Resources

Parents United for Public Schools: [www.parentsunited.org](http://www.parentsunited.org)

Minnesota PTA: [www.mnpta.org](http://www.mnpta.org)

Alliance for Student Achievement:  
[www.allianceforstudentachievement.org](http://www.allianceforstudentachievement.org)



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## Legislators in the Schools Confirmation Form

Thanks for hosting a legislator in one of the schools in your district! Please let us know, by filling out and returning this form to Parents United, which legislator you're hosting and the date of the visit.

Legislator who is visiting: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & time of visit: \_\_\_\_\_

School District: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Host: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Let us know how we can be helpful to you: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When you have a confirmed date for your legislator visit,  
please return this form, **or e-mail the information**, to Parents United:

**Parents United for Public Schools**  
**mary@parentsunited.org**  
Mary Cecconi, Executive Director  
833 Nordic Ave.  
Stillwater, MN 55082  
phone: 651-214-6565