Holding Effective Meetings with Legislators

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Types of Meetings

- Scheduled, sit-down meetings with legislator(s) in their office or off-site
- Fortuitous, unscheduled (but potentially planned) meetings with legislator(s) in elevators, grocery stores, Capitol lobby, etc.
- “Let me show you what we do” meetings at your program

By the end of this session, you’ll be ready to tackle all of these!
In-Person Scheduled Meeting DO’s

- Be Flexible
  - Make an appointment
    - Request at least 15 minutes
    - Ask how long you will have
    - Ask how many people you can/should bring
  - Meet with Staff

- Wear Business Dress
  - Better to err on side of overdressed than underdressed
  - Name tag on right-hand side

- Be Prepared
  - Request at least 15 minutes
  - Ask how long you will have
  - Ask how many people you can/should bring
  - Review Legislators’ bios
  - Practice your messaging
    - Know what you will say
    - Rehearse 3 main talking points
  - Pack:
    - Business cards
    - Fact sheet(s)
  - Turn Volume Off Mobile Devices & Put Them Away!
In-Person Scheduled Meeting

DO's

- Be Early for Appointment
  - Plan to meet your group by legislator’s office at least 3-5 minutes early
  - Review roles, main talking points, and order of speaking
  - Check-in with Staff

- Treat Staff Like Diamonds (But Be Genuine)
  - Introduce yourself & organization(s)
  - Thank Staff
  - Give Staff fact sheet(s)
  - Give Staff business card
  - Get Staff name and contact
  - Shmooze
In-Person Scheduled Meeting

DO’s

- SMILE and have fun!

- Start by Introducing Self and Others - *Even if you think they know you already*
  - Thank person for his or her time
  - If you are a Constituent – say so!

- Keep Your Eye on the Prize
  - Shmooze
  - Limit to beginning and very end of meeting
  - Stay on track
  - Pay attention to time
In-Person Scheduled Meeting

**DO’s**

- **Be Polite**
  - Please
  - Thank you

- **Be Respectful**
  - Legislators are humans too!
  - Listen as well as speaking
  - Time
  - Partners

- **Be Nonpartisan**
  - Keep it about the issues, not a political party
In-Person Scheduled Meeting DO’s

- **Be Honest**
  - Only say what you know
  - Offer to follow-up if don’t know answer, but think you can find it

- **How much do they already know?**
  - Assume they know **nothing** about your program (unless you specifically know otherwise) - explain like you are explaining to your friend/family member
  - Whenever possible, be specific (“please support Senate Bill 732” or “please add $2.3M to the Community Health Services line item of the Dept of Public Health”)
  - Avoid jargon and acronyms!
In-Person Scheduled Meeting

DO’s

- Follow-Up Within 1 Week
  - Write & send thank-you’s (Staff too)
  - Follow-up information you commit to
  - Provide any follow-up information you said you would and if you can’t get the information, let them know that too
Fortuitous, Unscheduled Meetings

You may have (or make) occasion to bump into a legislator:

- Introduce yourself by name and organization
- Ask if s/he has a minute or two to chat – if not, wish them well and let them go (or ask for a phone # to schedule a meeting)
- Make eye contact and smile!
- Summarize your issue/ask in 30-60 seconds. Tell them you are happy to follow up with a meeting or an email… let them take the lead a little bit.
Fortuitous, Unscheduled Meetings

You may have (or make) occasion to bump into a legislator:

- Make it “personal” or at least “district-oriented” if you can
- Remember to avoid jargon and acronyms!
- Thank him/her for his/her time.
- Follow up with meeting or email as legislator indicated.
Visiting the LOB

Ask how much time you have for meeting – stick to it!

Five minutes IS enough time
- 1 minute shmoozing
- 2 minutes background/context
- 1 minute ask
- 1 minute questions and final schmooze

Written Materials – first or last?

How many people should be in meeting?
- Notify office who will be attending
- Constituents!
“Come See My Program”

A great way to introduce a legislator to what you do and how it impacts the district/constituents!

Things to consider:

- **Timing:**
  - Even-numbered years: not February-early May, not August-November
  - Odd-numbered years: not March-early June
  - When does it work best for your program?

- Other stakeholders/partners?
To Do or Not To Do?

**DO NOT**
- Be rude or defensive or poke them in the chest (or anywhere!)
- Threaten
- Assume they will remember your name, organization, or issue – no matter how many times you have met
- Lie or make things up – if you do not know, tell them that, then find out
- Fail to follow-up if you say you will
  - If you can’t find the information you promised to follow-up with – tell them that too
- Sign them up for mass emails unless received permission to do so
FACT: School Breakfast Program

- Many children do not eat a nutritious breakfast at home in the morning.
- Many children are not ready to eat breakfast when they first wake up. Other children may have long commutes to school or long periods between breakfast at home and school lunch, making breakfast at school an important option.
- Research shows that children who eat breakfast at school closer to class and test taking times perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home.
- Properly nourished children more actively participate in the education experience, which benefits them, their fellow students, and the entire school community.
- Schools provide a valuable opportunity for students to practice nutrition skills in an environment supported by nutrition education and positive role modeling by adults.

FACT: National School Lunch

- USDA research indicates that children who participate in the National School Lunch Program have superior nutritional status compared to those who bring lunch from home or otherwise do not participate.
- Studies show that proper nutrition improves a child’s behavior, school performance, and overall cognitive development.
- The percent of children meeting the minimum number of daily food group servings specified in the Food Guide Pyramid are 35% for fruit, 45% for meat, 45% for vegetables, 65% for grains, and 65% for milk.
- Only 35% of children eat enough fiber (found in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and legumes such as beans, chick peas and black beans).
Why Support SB 1312: An Act Concerning A Pilot Program For in-Classroom Breakfasts

The Basics
- This bill creates a voluntary, competitive grant program for “severely needy” schools to design in-classroom breakfast programs.
- Up to 26 schools may receive a $10,000 grant from the State Department of Education.

Why in-Classroom Breakfast Matters
- A Dec. 2004 USDA report shows that schools that offered school breakfast in the classroom had the highest rates of students participating.
- The State Dept. of Education already provides a $2,000 grant for “severely needy” schools that participate in the School Breakfast Program.
- Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, and North Carolina all offer similar in-classroom pilot programs. Findings from Maryland’s program show a 8% decline in tardiness, 50% decrease in suspensions, and 5 point increase in achievement test scores.

School Breakfast Program, The Results: Add Up
- Children who have school breakfast consume a better overall diet, consume a lower percentage of calories from fat, and are less likely to have low intake levels of magnesium, vitamin C and folate.
- Offering a school breakfast is linked to lower levels of absenteeism and visits to the nurse as well as higher academic performance levels.

Why Support SB 1309: An Act Concerning School Nutrition

- The health and well-being of children should be the motivating factor in school food sales.
- 1 in 5 children between the ages of 6 and 17 are overweight.
- Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.

Support An Act Concerning School Nutrition for these reasons:

The decision-making will be local:
- This legislation creates district-wide Wellness Committees to create school wellness policies as mandated by the USDA. The members of the Wellness Committee will be members of the local communities, parents, teachers, health officials and students.
- Creation of nutrition education and fundraising policies will create healthier schools.

Kids will learn better:
- Implementing healthy food choices and exercise, as well as increasing the reach of the School Breakfast Program will allow students the tools they need to learn better and be healthier—both physically and mentally.

Personal Message to Legislators:
Additional federal funding available for
SCHOOL BREAKFAST:
$ 7,136,818

If current low-income school breakfast program participation increases from 59,011 to 89,016
(50% increase) Connecticut can receive an additional $ 7,136,818 in federal funding.

Additional federal funding available for
SUMMER FOOD:
$ 1,298,739

If current summer food participation increases from 33,034 to 53,194
(60% increase) Connecticut can receive an additional $ 1,298,739 in federal funding.

GRAND TOTAL AVAILABLE for increased participation in
SCHOOL BREAKFAST & SUMMER FOOD
$ 8,435,557
Why are so many district meal programs feeling the pinch?

Many food items needed to provide balanced, nutritious school meals have experienced double-digit price increases in the last 12 months:

- Milk: 14%
- Whole grain breads: 15%
- Cheese: 12%
- Eggs: 31%
- Fruits and Vegetables: 4%
- Pasta: 14%

In addition, food costs are also increasing. School nutrition directors from around the nation in a recent survey by the National School Nutrition Association reported the following this school year:

- 80% reported an increase in their programs’ food costs
- 85% indicated an increase in their programs’ labor costs
- 84% indicated an increase in their programs’ transportation costs
- 40% indicated an increase in their programs’ indirect costs - such as utility bills

Nationally, the average cost to prepare a school lunch is about $3.25. However, the average price schools districts are expected to charge students for a meal in 2009-2010 is $3.10. While the federal government provides a reimbursement of $0.23 per meal to schools, meal programs are often losing money on each meal served.

Doesn’t the federal government provide free food to schools?

The US Department of Agriculture operates a commodity food distribution program that provides about 16 cents worth of healthy food items (such as low-fat cheese, sliced apples and meat items) per meal served to school nutrition programs. However, the commodity foods only account for 15% to 10% of the food served on school lunch to over 30 million students each school day. Over 95% of the food schools serve is purchased through the same commercial foodservice vendors that serve restaurants.

Don’t local property taxes cover the cost of serving school lunches?

School nutrition programs are financially self-sufficient and operate separately from the general school district budget. While there are exceptions, generally school nutrition programs must cover all of their costs - including labor, food, supplies, equipment, utilities - from revenues they receive from paid lunches and federal reimbursements.

Are school lunches healthy?

Meals served under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must, by federal law, meet nutrition guidelines based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. No more than 30% of calories can come from fat and less than 10% from saturated fat. School lunches provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, riboflavin, calcium and sodium. These guidelines apply over the course of the weeks of school lunch menus. The USDA School Nutrition and Dietary Assessment (SNDA) study based on research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that about 90 percent of all schools nationwide, students had opportunities to select low-fat lunch options. In that, NSLP participants have substantially lower intakes of added sugars than do non-participants.

What will happen if 50% costs is eliminated from our reimbursement?

Food service programs will struggle even more to provide healthy real foods to our students. We will be forced to produce products based solely on price. Our children will be the ones who suffer. Monday’s breakfasts and Friday’s lunches are our student meals. With the current economy some families cannot afford to feed their children a healthy balanced meal on the weekends so the children are depending on the Lunch Program’s meals to make it through the week. Come Monday morning at breakfast and the children are starving. This is reality. We as School Nutrition professionals not only hear these stories but we see them with our own eyes in our schools.

This is the economy when our children need us the most. At the very least keep funding where it is, but don’t cut it.
Get to Know Your Elected Officials

**Email!**
- Provide current information/data
- Ask for their support
- Invite
- Thank You

**TIPS**
- Subject line: Constituent
- Body: Name, full address
- Accurate & Current
- CONCISE
- Clear Action Step
Get to Know Your Elected Officials

Call!
- Provide current information/data
- Ask for their support
- Invite
- Thank You

TIPS
- Be polite & friendly
- Have relevant information in front of you
- Who will answer the phone?
Get to Know Your Elected Officials

**District Visit!**
- Tour Organization
- Observe and/or Engage in Activities or Operations
- Volunteer
- Community Meeting
- Stakeholder Conversation

**TIPS**
- Schedule during recess
- Punctual start and END
- Confirm
- Follow-up
- Constituents
Final Thoughts

- Who knows your program better than you? (No one!)
- Who else can support your request?
  - People impacted by your program
  - Organizations similar to yours/serve similar clients
- How many different ways have you tried to engage?
  - Phone
  - Emails
  - Letters
  - In-person meetings
  - Social media
Final Thoughts

- Still not confident?
- Got questions?

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