

Hosting a Site Visit for Members of Congress

Hosting site visits for members of Congress are an excellent way to not only continue to build your relationship between yourself and your elected officials, but also to establish yourself as a resource for them and their staff. Site visits allow elected officials the opportunity to see that PTA is not about bake sales, but about school and family engagement and school reform. Your elected officials can see firsthand the things your local PTA is doing for the school in his or her district.

Planning the Visit

Before you begin coordinating a school site visit, check with the principal on policies for site visits. Meet with school officials to brainstorm what you would like to accomplish and what messages you would like to deliver, such as highlighting successful family engagement programs within your school and advocating for certain legislation. In order to ensure the visit runs smoothly, create a draft agenda for the visit—including which classrooms, program and personnel you'd like your member of Congress to see in action.

Scheduling the Visit

Arrange a site visit when your member of Congress is home in his or her district and when school is in session. Members of Congress are usually in their home districts Friday through Monday and during the August recess. **Check the Congressional Calendar for additional recess opportunities**, at <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/schedules.htm>. Fax or email a letter of request to your member of Congress's district scheduler at least six weeks in advance of the proposed site visit (**PTA Take Action Center**, at <http://capwiz.com/npta2/home/>, can provide you with their contact information). Explain why you believe the member of Congress's visit would be beneficial (i.e., to see effective family engagement programs). Include specific information about the visit, such as date, time, location, others who may be invited (i.e., business partners), whether the media will be present, and what activities are planned for the visit. Members of Congress's schedules can be hectic, so be as flexible as possible with your schedule to accommodate the member. When the member's office has provided a possible date, make sure to coordinate with the school and district staff to place this date on the calendar and work out any possible scheduling conflicts, such as school wide testing.

Alerting the Media

Work with the member of Congress's press secretary or communications director and school staff to coordinate press activity. Invite local television news stations and newspapers to cover the event. Send a media advisory to all the local news outlets alerting them to the time, date and purpose of the site visit. If the media is unable to be present, take pictures and include them with a summary of the activities and send this to the local media outlets.

Hosting the Visit

Prepare teachers and students before the visit by explaining what to expect as well as appropriate behaviors during the visit. Teachers can plan lessons and activities to help students understand the role of our legislators, civic responsibilities and the purpose of the visit. Have students interact with the member of Congress and provide that member

with literature on local statistics regarding the effectiveness of your programs and family engagement, anecdotes of success stories, and other information that shows the connection between PTA, your community and the member's constituents. Make your requests for legislation needed to strengthen your school or family engagement policies.

After the Visit

Send a media release to local news outlets. Send a thank-you letter, including any photos and press stories. Be sure parents sign a release form before pictures or names of students go out in the media, at <http://www.pta.org/MediaReleaseForm.doc>. In the letter recap the highlights of their visit and restate any requests for legislation needed to strengthen your school and family engagement policies.



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