



VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association

Leadership • Advocacy • Support

VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month

A Guide for School Boards & School Administrators

NOVEMBER IS “VSBA TAKE YOUR LEGISLATOR TO SCHOOL” MONTH

Building a closer relationship between public education and the Virginia State Legislature is essential to the well-being of our students. The Virginia School Boards Association urges each school division in the state to invite at least one of their state legislators to visit their schools during the month of November.

There are many benefits from participating in *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month*, including developing closer relationships between school divisions, local communities, and our elected officials, and creating opportunities for productive dialogue so that educational and political leaders can work together to ensure that we provide the best possible education for our students.

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In addition, when legislators visit your schools as part of *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month*, local students will have the opportunity to interact with elected officials and learn about the important roles and responsibilities of Virginia General Assembly members. A visit by your local legislator creates teachable moments.

What Types of Activities Can We Implement?

There are many different types of activities that your division and local legislators can implement, including speaking to civics classes about current “hot topics”, reading to younger students, participating in a mock election, discussing the Virginia legislative process, etc. The precise format for each visit should be negotiated between the division or school and the legislator, but we recommend it include a tour of school facilities conducted by a board member or other division officials. Use this opportunity to raise awareness of division successes, showcase a particular program that a legislator helped fund, or highlight division needs that have gone unmet.

Promote & Celebrate Your Visit

- After you have issued your invitation and planned the visit, distribute a media alert (sample enclosed) and invite the media to cover the visit.
- Take pictures and include a story about the visit in your division newsletter and on the division web site.
- Have participating students send thank you letters to the visiting legislator.
- Notify the VSBA of your activities. We may attend your event, promote it in our newsletter or on our web site, and/or include a news story in the VSBA Daily News.

We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to strengthen the already solid bond between public education and the Virginia General Assembly. These activities cannot help but aid VSBA as it lobbies on your behalf on education issues. Thank you for all that you do as a leader, advocate, and supporter of public education.

QUICK TIPS & SUGGESTIONS

- ❑ Discuss what your divisions or school would like to get out of a visit by a state legislator and phrase your invitation accordingly.
- ❑ Consider activities involving one or two classes, rather than the entire student body.
- ❑ Thank the legislator for his or her past support for public education.
- ❑ Help the legislator decide what activities and topics would be appropriate for what age groups. Legislators may have received some suggestions from the clerks, but school staff might help them plan others.
- ❑ Be sensitive to the fact that every school and division has at least two representatives in the legislature, a senator and delegate, and perhaps more.
- ❑ Invite all of your legislators. While some may not respond to your invitation, others might feel slighted at not receiving one.
- ❑ Obtain the lawmaker's biography from his or her office or web site for use in introductions and news releases.
- ❑ Be alert to promising opportunities for photos. Sometimes that alone will be sufficient to attract newspaper or TV media coverage.
- ❑ Apprise the VSBA of your activities, past and planned, to help us promote this event this year and in future years.
- ❑ *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month* should be just one part of ongoing year-round communication that takes place between your division and Virginia elected officials.

WHO ARE YOUR LEGISLATORS?

<http://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov>

Visit the Virginia General Assembly web site to identify your local legislators and obtain contact information.

SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER

Dear Delegate/Senator _____:

On behalf of the school board of _____, we would like to invite you to visit our schools as part of *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month*, which is being observed in November.

Coordinated by the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA), the goal of *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month* is to build a stronger relationship between schools and legislators. The event gives legislators an opportunity to observe what is going on in Virginia schools, and provides Virginia's young people the opportunity to meet and interact with an elected official.

There are many exciting and innovative things happening each day in _____ schools, and several members of our school board would like to give you a tour of our school facilities. Our teachers are implementing new, research-based instructional strategies, and our students are using a variety of new technology methods such as _____. In addition, you are welcome to speak to our government classes, read to our elementary students, or just walk the buildings with our principals to learn about public education in our division. We are open to your ideas on how to make this time with your young constituents most productive.

We plan to invite the local media to attend your visit, which we think communicates the high degree of interest that state and local leaders have in public education.

If your schedule permits you to accept this invitation, please contact us at _____ with some dates and times and we can discuss the details of your visit.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Cordially,

School Board Chairman

Division Superintendent

SAMPLE MEDIA ALERT

Media Alert

For Immediate Release

**Senator/Delegate <INSERT NAME> to Visit <INSERT SCHOOL NAME>
for VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month**

- Who:** Senator/Delegate <INSERT NAME>, School Board Chairman <INSERT NAME>, Superintendent <INSERT NAME>, <INSERT OTHER KEY PARTICIPANTS>
- What:** As part of *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month*, Senator/Delegate <INSERT NAME> will be visiting <INSERT SCHOOL NAME> to lead discussions and conduct other activities designed to show students how the democratic process works and to heighten awareness of citizen rights and responsibilities.
- Why:** November is *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month*. It was created by the Virginia School Boards Association to build stronger relationships between public education and the Virginia General Assembly. *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month* gives legislators an opportunity to observe what is going on in Virginia schools, and provides Virginia's young people the chance to meet and interact with an elected official.
- When:** <INSERT DATE AND TIME; IF THERE IS A SPECIFIC SCHEDULE, INSERT HERE>
- <TIME> Arrival
<TIME> Tour of school facilities
<TIME> Visit to classroom
<TIME> Departure
- Where:** <INSERT LOCATION>
- Contact:** <INSERT SCHOOL DIVISION CONTACT>

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A Few Tips

- Distribute the media alert via email or fax anywhere from a few days to a few weeks prior to the event, depending on the deadline of the media outlet, how quickly you have the necessary information, and how fast the opportunity has come up.
- Take photos at the legislator's visit and send a press release to your local media after the event (let them know that photos are available). That way, even if they couldn't attend they can still cover the story.
- Use the photos and press release as content for a division newsletter or web site article.

VSBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS PROCLAMATION



PROCLAMATION VSBA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WHEREAS, it is of paramount importance that all young people in Virginia are afforded the opportunity to receive a quality education in Virginia's public schools; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's continued student success requires an excellent understanding of what is required for excellence in the 21st century; and

WHEREAS, school boards and legislators must work together, to promote high academic standards and excellent facilities that help all of Virginia's students become productive, contributing citizens; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's school boards have been at the forefront of these endeavors to foster close relationships between schools and communities to strengthen and improve Virginia's public education system; and

WHEREAS, it is paramount to acknowledge the work and support of our state legislators and the necessary partnership between our state legislators and local school boards as we strive to make Virginia's public schools optimal learning institutions, now therefore, be it

Resolved that Now, the VSBA Board of Directors hereby recognizes the month of November in perpetuity as "**VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month**" in the Commonwealth of Virginia. We call this observance to the attention of our citizens and state legislators, and encourage community-wide calls for state legislators to visit at least one school in each of the school divisions within their legislative jurisdictions during this special month.

Virginia School Boards Association
Board of Directors