



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 lawmakers serving in the Virginia General Assembly 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.

The benefits from participating in the *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month* provide an opportunity for developing closer relationships between school divisions, local communities, and our elected officials. A successful legislative visit can spur further dialogue providing education and political leaders the platform to 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 a variety of activities that your division can do when hosting legislators. These include, luncheons/breakfasts, speaking to civics classes, reading to younger students, 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 each visit 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 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.
- Present the visit in “real time” by using Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube. Be sure to tag the elected official in your posts if they have social media accounts.
- Take pictures/video and include a story about the visit in your division newsletter, as well as on division social media accounts, and division web site. If your division has a school-based media class/club with student reporters, this is a good way to involve students in providing news coverage that can be used by the division in promoting the visit.
- Have participating students send handwritten 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 published 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 will 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 division 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. Consider activities that provide a good photo opportunity for the school division and legislator.
- ❑ 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. School divisions may have multiple senators and delegates serving in the legislature.
- ❑ Invite each of your legislators. While some may not respond to your invitation, others might feel slighted at not receiving one.
- ❑ Obtain the legislator'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 enough to attract newspaper or TV media coverage.
- ❑ Use Hashtag **#VALeg2school** when posting on social media.
- ❑ 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 members of the Virginia General Assembly.

Have Questions?

Contact VSBA Government Relations Specialist, J.T. Kessler, at jason@vsba.org or 434-295-8722.

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 students 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 Chair

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 Chair <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 students 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, social media, or fax anywhere from 1-2 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/video during the legislator's visit and send a press release to your local media following the conclusion of the event (let them know that photos/video is available). This content will allow media outlets to create a story, even if they were unable to attend the event.
- Use the photos and press release as content for a division newsletter or web site article.

SAMPLE IMAGES



To promote a closer relationship between public education and the Virginia State Legislature, invite at least one state legislator to visit your schools during the month of November.



VIRTUAL TIPS & SUGGESTIONS

Social Media Posts:

- Share information on your websites or through your social network channels. Generating awareness is a powerful tool to creating positive social engagement.
- **Share the resolution adopted by the school board.**
- Share images from the in-person or virtual visits.
- Share a post of gratitude for the support of the Legislator(s).
- Share the bios of your Legislator(s) showcasing the ways they have supported your division.
- Share any student created coverage of the in person or virtual visit.

Social Media to Follow:

#VALeg2school

VSBA Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VirginiaSchoolBoardsAssociation/>

VSBA Twitter: <https://twitter.com/VASchoolBoards?s=20>

Ideas for taking your events online:

- Host Virtual Meetings with Legislators. Legislators can join virtually to visit or check in with various classes/buildings. Schedule a day of short virtual visits.
 - Legislator could read to elementary students via zoom (or similar platform)
 - Legislator could meet with students to hear about a new program/initiative
 - Legislator could take a virtual tour of a new facility led by school board members and or student representatives.
 - Student Media could conduct a virtual interview or provide coverage of the virtual visit.
- Host a virtual panel or meeting with your legislator and student representatives.
- Create a division wide video to showcase your division and share with your legislator, get students involved in the planning and production.

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