

## ADVICE FOR STEM TEACHERS FOR ENGAGING POLICYMAKERS

Find this handout and all reading samples online: <http://ccst.us/caltac/nsta17session>



### ~ The Federal-Level Policy Landscape | Jay Labov, PhD ~

1. **Congress Oversight of Education:** Two committees — U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, and U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce — are responsible for overseeing bills related to education.
2. **States Hold the Keys:** Responsibility for education is divested to the states, and of total national spending on K-12 education, only ~8% is contributed by Federal agencies. Federal funds are distributed to states through formula funding and competitive grants, but amounts vary widely across states.
3. **Programs Span Many Departments:** Programs for STEM are spread across many Federal departments and agencies, not just Department of Education. Many are administered by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

### ~ Talking with Policymakers | Sarah Brady, PhD ~

1. **Decide on 1-3 Main Takeaways:** What are the 1-3 key points you would like the policymaker to remember? You can provide details if they have questions, but otherwise, focus on these high-level points. You need to be prepared to weave these points to 1) explain why should they care about what you have to say, and 2) tell a compelling story that resonates with their interests in under 3 minutes.
2. **Do Your Homework:** Are you meeting with a Member or their staffer? What district do they represent, and what are their main issue areas? Is this the right time to offer comment on a bill?
3. **Prepare a One-Pager:** Create a simple handout for the policymaker and their staff to keep. Include your main takeaways, numbers/figures, and your contact information. This will increase the likelihood that they remember your main points, and for staffers to reach out to you with future questions.

### ~ Know Your Policy Vocabulary ~

1. **Member:** Lingo referring to the elected official, short for “Member of the \_\_\_” (e.g. Senate, House).
2. **Committee:** Legislative committees are created around specific topic areas (e.g. Education, Energy). Bills are assigned to the relevant committee, whose members vote on which bills get moved forward and which ones get held. As such, committee assignments offer Members a certain influence/prestige.
3. **Legislative Aide** or **Staffer:** Lingo referring to a Member’s staff, who conduct analyses and handle official business on behalf of their Member, including meeting with the public. Staff play the essential role of keeping their Member informed on issues, and advising them on how to vote on bills.
4. **Factsheet** or **One-Pager:** A single-sheet handout often used for meetings with policymakers, to be left behind with staffers or sent ahead of meetings. Many use bullet lists. Often front-side only.
5. **Letter of Support** and **Testimony:** Letters are written by citizens or organizations, sent to Members to share their story or to champion an issue. Testimonies are prepared remarks written by citizens or organization representatives at the invitation of Members, and read to the committee at public hearings.
6. **Amendments:** Changes made to a bill during the legislative process. Amendments are made on the advice of committee staff, with input from relevant experts, or negotiated with other policymakers.
7. **Legislative Calendar:** Both Congress and state legislatures adhere to official calendars with deadlines for certain procedural actions for moving, amending, or holding a bill. Understanding these deadlines can help you plan and strategize your actions for submitting advice or comment.

## COMMUNICATING ADVICE VERSUS ADVOCACY

### ~ Pro-Tips for Communicating ADVICE ~

1. **Tell a Story from the Real World:** Most people in the Capitol building have no idea what life is like as a teacher in the classroom — so convey the implications of proposed laws through your individual context as a teacher. Remember that “speaking from experience” is not necessarily advocacy, when you provide evidence as a professional/practitioner.
2. **Provide Data:** Again, data and numbers serve as the most impartial advice. Do the research for the legislative office you are looking to advise, and give them evidence to inform their decisions. You don’t always have to come up with an entire research paper — consider giving examples of how a particular policy might affect you/your classroom/your school, in terms of dollars, hours, and other numbers.
3. **Think Like a Policy Analyst:** Policy people love numbers and consequences spelled out for them — especially in alternative scenarios. They are always looking for ways to compare potential outcomes given Policy A, Policy B, or “No Change”. So break things down, using yourself as an example.

### ~ Pro-Tips for Communicating ADVOCACY ~

1. **Take Advantage of Bigger Organizations:** To amplify your impact, find out who the loudest voices are on a policy issue, and who best represents your position and ethics. Sharing your stories/examples with these influential organizations/unions/lobbyists helps fuel their advocacy actions and strategies.
2. **Take a Clear Position and Submit a Letter:** Pick a side on an issue/bill, and explain why you support this position, from your own view as a education professional. Remember, personal stories are *powerful*, and data and numbers are hard to argue against.
3. **Address the Relevant Office/Partner:** Most importantly, talk to the right office at the right time. Identify staff/officials/advocates who can actually take action on a particular issue or bill, and understand at what point in the legislative calendar or process your opinion will be most effective.

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### What would you want out of a policy leadership program for STEM

**teachers?** The National Academies TAC and CCST CalTAC want to know, to help us explore the creation of full-length workshops in public policy, communication, or other leadership skills. **Please fill out our survey, and share it with your peers!**

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