

*A Resource Manual (2021 edition)*

*Presented by the Georgia School Boards Association*



**Working Together.**  
**Let's ADVOCATE FOR**  
**Public Schools.**



**GSBA**

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# Foreword

*Elected boards in every school district in Georgia are charged with the awesome responsibility of making decisions to ensure that the schools are well-managed and budgets are balanced. The quality of education for the 1.7 million students who attend Georgia schools is largely dependent on how well those decisions are made. But other decisions made by the Georgia General Assembly also impact your school district and schools across the state. That is why it is critical that school board members – now more than ever before – become active advocates for public education.*



## Why is your advocacy so important?

- Because you know and understand what is necessary to provide a quality education.
- Because you annually must deal with the difficulties of balancing your local budgets.
- Because in a time when diverse messages are being sent to legislators, your voice representing the best interests of students must be heard.

- Because legislators must hear the message that having a quality education system has more long-term benefits than creating the perception of fiscal savings by slicing education budgets and reducing programs – especially when these matters are considered without the benefit of study or input from boards of education as to their value and effect.

## **Will what you do really make a difference?**

Yes, it will! As school board members, you are in an excellent position to educate and influence the legislative process.

- You, like they, are elected officials and hold positions of influence in your community.
- You have dealt with a variety of issues at the local level and can therefore be an informed source of information about education policy from a local perspective.
- As the policy-makers for your school district, you play a direct and key role in partnering with the state to carry out the constitutional mandate that the “provision of an adequate public education for the citizens shall be a primary obligation of the state of Georgia.”



# Top 5 Checklist

## 1. Get Informed

My State Senator: \_\_\_\_\_

My State Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Contact Your Legislators

### Contacted During Interim:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)\_\_\_\_\_ (phone/e-mail/in person)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)\_\_\_\_\_ (phone/e-mail/in person)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)\_\_\_\_\_ (phone/e-mail/in person)

### Contacted During Session:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)\_\_\_\_\_ (phone/e-mail/in person)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)\_\_\_\_\_ (phone/e-mail/in person)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)\_\_\_\_\_ (phone/e-mail/in person)

### ***3. Share Information***

Action (date & description) \_\_\_\_\_

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Action (date & description) \_\_\_\_\_

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Action (date & description) \_\_\_\_\_

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### ***4. Invite & Involve***

Action (date & description) \_\_\_\_\_

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Action (date & description) \_\_\_\_\_

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### ***5. Come to Atlanta***

Trips to Atlanta (date & description) \_\_\_\_\_

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### ***Follow Up with GSBA***

Let the GSBA Legislative team know about your conversations with legislators and what responses you receive.

# Know your Elected Officials

You can find contact information for your legislators on the GSBA website. Look under Advocacy and Communications/Capitol Watch Online.

## Your Senator

Name \_\_\_\_\_

District No. \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Local Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Atlanta Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

## Your Representative

Name \_\_\_\_\_

District No. \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Local Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Atlanta Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_



# Get Informed



The first step in effective advocacy is to get informed. It is important that you, as an advocate, understand the issues and are comfortable with your knowledge of them. Thorough preparation will make you a more confident and successful advocate.

There are many resources available to help you build your knowledge base. A starting point may be the GSBA website's legislative resources ([www.gsba.com](http://www.gsba.com)), where you will find a wealth of information:

- GSBA's Legislative Positions & Priorities
- Track legislation and read daily updates during the session

The legislature's website ([www.legis.ga.gov](http://www.legis.ga.gov)) also provides valuable information:

- Read biographies of your legislators
- Know who legislative leaders are
- Listen to or watch legislative hearings live or archived

It is also important to stay current with issues by reading newspaper and magazine articles about education.

# Contact Your Legislators

By regularly contacting your legislators and developing a relationship with them, you will be able to assist them in making well-informed decisions regarding education. You can use email, write letters, or make telephone calls. Contact your legislators prior to the legislative session to introduce yourself and begin to develop a relationship.

## When you call during the interim:

- Give your name, title and the name of the school board on which you serve.
- Don't be surprised if you have to schedule a time to speak with the legislator; remember, most legislators have full-time jobs during the interim.
- Focus your conversation on one or two top priorities, remembering that your immediate goal is to introduce yourself and offer yourself as a resource for the legislator on education issues

## When you call during a legislative session:

- Ask to speak with the senator or representative, but be prepared to discuss your issue with a legislative assistant.
- Give your name, title and the name of the school board on which you serve.
- Focus your call on ONE issue or bill and, if possible, identify the bill by number; briefly state what position you want the legislator to take and be prepared to offer your rationale based on local impact.
- Always ask what position your legislator will be taking on the bill or issue.
- Share with the GSBA staff what you learned about legislators' positions on issues.

# Share Information

**The next step** in effective advocacy is to share the information you have gained with your board, your neighbors and your community. No one is more qualified than you to talk about your school district and what is going on within it.

- Formalize legislative advocacy on your board by creating a standing agenda item for legislative updates during the session. Use this time to update your board and, by extension, your community on issues of legislative importance. Report on your contacts with legislators.
- Work with other local elected officials on common issues.
- Ask to speak to civic and community groups on issues of importance to education. As a school board member, you are a community leader and you can have great influence on your community's attitudes.
- Use local media to advocate for public education. Talk to the local newspaper's education reporter to help her or him understand your district and education in general. Meet with the editorial board to encourage a bolder position on the vital role public education plays in your community. Strong relationships with local media representatives mean they know they can rely on you as a resource for education stories.
- Finally, write a guest opinion editorial for the newspaper to convey your message to a broader audience.

# Invite and Involve the Community

One effective local activity is arranging opportunities for your district to be highlighted as the center of your community. It is vitally important that we continue to introduce ourselves to our public, including our legislative leaders.



- Invite your legislators and members of the public to visit your schools or to events that highlight successful programs in your district. Arrange for legislators to tour one or more schools to showcase your district's achievements and successes. Be sure to call or email media representatives in advance and promptly thank your legislators for coming to the school.
- One of the hardest activities – but potentially the most effective, is building and activating a local coalition focused on public education. You can form a coalition with stakeholder groups in your community. By engaging these stakeholders in the process, you will build understanding and good-will.

# Come to Atlanta

Culminate your advocacy efforts and help ensure a successful legislative session for issues affecting public education, by visiting Atlanta and meeting with your legislators.



Attend a GSBA/GSSA Legislative Site Visit or schedule another time for your board, administration or both to travel to Atlanta to meet with your legislators and push for sustained investment in education.

## Follow up with GSBA

Let us know how your conversations go with your legislators!

GSBA-800-226-1856 or 770-962-2985

*Angela Palm*, GSBA Director of Policy & Legislative Services: [apalm@gsba.com](mailto:apalm@gsba.com)

*Scott Bierman*, GSBA Legislative Services Associate: [sbierman@gsba.com](mailto:sbierman@gsba.com)

*Grace Kim*, GSBA Legislative Services Associate: [gkim@gsba.com](mailto:gkim@gsba.com)

# Top 10 Tips of Effective Lobbying

**Tip 1** Research your legislators' backgrounds, committee assignments and voting records on education issues. Do their children attend your schools?

**Tip 2** Develop relationships with your legislators by routinely visiting, writing and calling; let them know you are a constituent.

**Tip 3** Don't overdo your lobbying. Only write, call or visit when you have something to say.

**Tip 4** Invite your legislators to visit your schools. Plan a tour of your school district to showcase successful programs in action.

**Tip 5** Lobby with your real-life experience. It's your most persuasive tool; use local examples.

**Tip 6** Set priorities. When everything is important, nothing is important.

**Tip 7** Shore up lobbying allies from your community to demonstrate broad support; collaborate with others.

**Tip 8** Don't forget the media. Getting your message out to the press – letters-to-the editor, news releases, etc. – can influence your legislators and public opinion.

**Tip 9** Always be positive and courteous. In politics, there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies.

**Tip 10** Everyone likes a pat on the back. Remember to thank each of your legislators for jobs well done.

# A Checklist of Quick Communication Tips

\_\_\_\_\_ Know local needs and impact of legislation on your school district.

\_\_\_\_\_ Speak up; be heard on issues of concern to you. Your actions and inactions count.

\_\_\_\_\_ Focus on your legislators.

\_\_\_\_\_ Know your issues. Check GSBA's [Capitol-Watch Online \(www.gsba.com\)](http://www.gsba.com) on a daily basis during the session to keep abreast of legislative news. You can also e-mail your legislator.

\_\_\_\_\_ Follow through with any information promised  
Be honest in your approach.

\_\_\_\_\_ Identify and utilize common interest/  
issues/activities.

Your knowledge of issues and the legislative process produces credibility with your legislator; your credibility dictates your legislator's level of response.

\_\_\_\_\_ Be direct.

- a. Make specific requests.
- b. Get specific commitments.
- c. Follow up: Hold a legislator accountable for his/her commitments.

\_\_\_\_\_ Be sensitive to your legislator's other political necessities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Make yourself a contact point for your legislator within your district.

\_\_\_\_\_ When e-mailing, use the appropriate etiquette in addressing the legislator.

# Writing Letters-to-the-Editor and Opinion Editorials

*Letters-to-the-editor and opinion editorials written by readers (called op-eds) are useful ways to speak out on an issue, respond to an article or editorial, or express your position in your own words. They often are read by members of the General Assembly and can do double-time as a lobbying tool. Concentrate on writing letters-to-the-editor or op-eds for your local newspaper since that will have the greatest impact on legislators. Even a letter or op-ed that does not get published is valuable because it may be considered by a newspaper's editorial board reviewing an issue. Or it may cause the paper to write a story on the topic.*

## Hints for effective letters-to-the-editor and op-eds:

1. **Be brief and focus on one issue.** If the article is too long, the newspaper may edit out some important facts. To get an idea of how long is too long, take a look at your newspaper's opinions page and count the words in an average letter-to-the-editor. The average op-ed is usually longer than a letter-to-the-editor and is between 500 and 750 words.
2. **For a letter-to-the-editor, refer to a recent event or an article,** which has appeared in the newspaper and include the article's date and title.
3. **When applicable, close your letter or op-ed by asking readers to contact** their members of the General Assembly or other policymakers about the issue.
4. **Give your address, school district and phone number** so that the newspaper can verify authorship.
5. **Send your published letter-to-the-editor or op-ed to your legislators.**

# State Office

## **Governor**

State of Georgia  
State Capitol, Room 203  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334  
(404) 656-1776

## **Lieutenant Governor**

President of the Senate  
State of Georgia  
State Capitol, Room 240  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334  
(404) 656-5030

## **Secretary of State**

State of Georgia  
State Capitol, Room 214  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334  
(404) 656-2881

## **Attorney General**

40 Capitol Square, SW Atlanta,  
Georgia 30334-1330  
(404) 656-3300

## **State Superintendent of Schools**

2066 Twin Towers East  
Atlanta, GA 30334-5001  
(404) 656-2800

## **The Honorable (insert name of State Representative)**

State Representative, District (insert number)  
Georgia House of Representatives  
The Capitol, Atlanta, GA 30334  
The salutation of your letter should read,  
“Dear Representative (insert last name).”



**The Honorable (insert name of State Senator)**

State Senator, District (insert number)

Georgia State Senate

The Capitol Atlanta,

GA 30334

The salutation of your letter should read,

“Dear Senator (insert last name).”

**The President**

The White House

Washington, D.C. 20500

The salutation of your letter should read,

“Dear Mr. or Madam President.”

**The Honorable (insert U.S. Senator’s name)**

Senate Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515

The salutation of your letter should read,

“Dear Senator (insert last name).”

**The Honorable (insert U.S. Representative’s name)**

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

The salutation of your letter should read,

“Dear Congressman/woman (insert last name).”



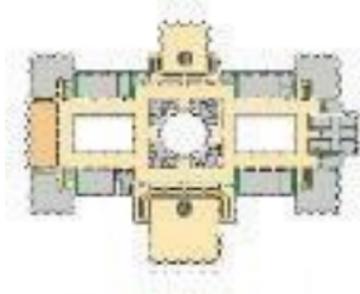
# Schedule of the 2021 General Assembly Session

<b><i>Date</i></b>	<b><i>Event</i></b>
<b>January 11</b>	Legislature convenes (House and Senate chambers)
<b>January 18</b>	Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday
<b>From Day 1</b>	House Rules Committee takes exclusive control of calendar; approval needed for bills to be taken to the floor for a vote.
<b>Day 6</b>	Senate Rules Committee takes exclusive control of calendar; approval needed for bills to be taken to the floor for a vote.
<b>Day 30</b>	Last day that Senate will take new general bills from either House or Senate for the rest of session
<b>Day 39</b>	Last day that Senate may consider any general bills
<b>Day 40</b>	General Assembly adjourns

By law, the Legislature begins its 40-day session on the second Monday of January. With various stoppages, the session could last past March 31st. The legislators generally meet Monday-Friday with the House and Senate starting at 10 a.m. and various committees meeting in the afternoon.

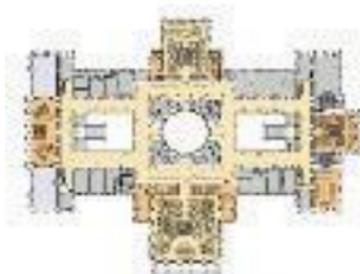
# Map of Capitol

Below is a map of the Georgia State Capitol Floor plans. Map is courtesy of <http://sos.ga.gov>



## FOURTH FLOOR

- House Gallery
- Senate Gallery
- Capitol Museum (Corridors)



## THIRD FLOOR

- House Chamber
- Senate Chamber
- Appropriations Room
- Restrooms



## SECOND FLOOR

- Office of the Governor
- Office of the Secretary of State
- Office of the Lieutenant Governor
- Tour Desk



## FIRST FLOOR

- Hall of Valor
- Snack Bar
- Restrooms

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