

Meeting with your Elected Official

Meetings with elected officials are a great way to educate them on child development and education. Most legislators want to meet with citizens from their districts to hear their concerns and recommendations. Remember that you have several elected officials at the federal, state and local levels with different decision-making authority. As time permits, it's a good idea to establish working relationships with all of them.

Arranging the Meeting...

- Call your legislator's office and make an appointment. Ask to speak with the appointments secretary or scheduler.
- Identify yourself as a member of PACE and constituent of the legislator, stating where you live. Briefly explain that you would like to talk with the elected official about the important role that PACE plays in the lives of California's children, the organization's accomplishments, and its needs.
- Request a 30-minute meeting with the elected official. You might be given less time, but it doesn't hurt to ask for 30 minutes. If the legislator is unavailable, request a meeting with a legislative aide or other staff person who is responsible for or knowledgeable about child care issues.
- Send a note or fax to confirm the appointment. Include the time, date and location of the appointment, as well as your name, address, and daytime phone number.

Preparing for the Meeting...

- Gather a small group, if possible, (three is optimum) to accompany you during the meeting. Bring different members of your organization, representing various stakeholders in the child care industry. The more diversity in the group that meets with the elected official, the better.
- Map out what you want to tell the elected official. Remember that many elected officials don't know what the needs are of the child care community, or preschool. Your job is to help educate them on the needs of the child care industry. Your presentation may include:
 - An explanation of child care in California.
 - What PACE is
 - What kinds of projects you have accomplished
 - The needs of the child care community and what issues are effecting it
 - Ways the official can help and work with your organization
- If in a group, divide up the tasks of who is the main spokesperson, and who will answer questions on specific topics. Also, assign someone to take notes and to write the follow-up letter.
- Think about the kinds of questions the legislator may ask and develop answers
- Prepare a packet of information to leave with the elected official

During the Meeting...

- Be on time. Your legislator has a full schedule. Sometimes elected officials may not be on time due to meetings or hearings. Be patient and flexible. If the legislator must leave early, ask to continue the discussion with a staff person.
- Introduce yourself and everyone in your group, and identify PACE. Thank the legislator for taking the time to meet with you. Make your presentation. Be concise. Emphasize that the organization's accomplishments and cooperation among its diverse members are things the elected official can be proud of.
- Request a specific action from the legislator. Some examples of actions include:
 - Invite legislator to tour your child care center
 - Ask him/her to support funding for early education and preschool
 - Request that the legislator write a supportive letter to local government representatives concerning early education
 - Ask legislator to call you when he/she has questions about preschool and current issues
 - After making your presentation, let the legislator respond. Listen carefully. Have another member take notes so you can focus on what the legislator is saying.
- Answer the legislator's questions as best you can. Make a note of the questions you could not answer and tell the legislator you will follow-up with answers.
- Remember to leave the legislator and the staff your packet of information. Always thank the legislator or staff member for his or her time.

After the Meeting...

- Immediately take notes regarding the main points of discussion, the legislator's remarks, any unanswered questions, etc.
- Complete your research to find information for unanswered questions.
- Promptly follow up with a thank you letter. Respond to outstanding questions.
- Stay in touch with the legislator. The meeting was the beginning of an ongoing relationship. Keep the legislator informed on your projects, goals, meetings, and any concerns or issues that come up.