



VSBA

Virginia School Boards Association

Government Relations

Take Your Legislator to School Month November 2024



Participation in VSBA initiatives and observances is optional. School boards in Virginia have the discretion on whether to participate locally. Any related materials from the Association are shared as suggested ideas for implementation for any member board that may choose to do so.

VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month

November 2024

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 encourages 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 of participating in the *VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month* provides opportunities 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.

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 discussed 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 representatives. 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.
- Take pictures/video and include a story about the meeting in your division newsletter, as well as on division social media accounts, and the division website. 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 meeting.
- Have participating students send handwritten thank you letters to the legislator.
- Notify the VSBA of your activities. We may attend your events or promote them in the VSBA Daily News and social media feeds. Please send photos to communications@vsba.org and use hashtag **#VALeg2school** when posting to social media.

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. If you have any questions, please contact VSBA Director of Legislative Services, J.T. Kessler, at jason@vsba.org or (434) 295-8722.

VSBA Grassroots Advocacy

Grassroots advocacy and local school boards

School board members play a critical role in advocating for their local school division. The advocacy efforts of school board members not only impact the outcomes of students and teachers within your division, but also are vital to preserving local control of school division operations in the Commonwealth.

The advocacy you undertake within your local school division greatly assists the efforts of the Virginia School Boards Association Government Relations team. It is often mentioned by legislators to our team when they have heard from a member of their local school board or when a member visits them in Richmond. The information you share with legislators is invaluable as not every Senator or Delegate is an expert on K-12 education. If they do not hear from you, they will hear from someone else making it imperative to share your stories.

Your Role as a Grassroots Advocate

Grassroots advocacy is described as any advocacy activity that takes place at the local or community level. Grassroots advocacy involves identifying, adopting, and promoting a cause that shapes public perception or influence public policy; it is a process by which stakeholders (school board members) make their voices heard.

Grassroots advocacy is very effective for associations as school board members have tremendous power to generate change within the public policy sphere. Grassroots advocacy is different from lobbying as it involves school board members, rather than professional lobbyists, educating their legislators and other government officials on how legislation and regulations will impact the school division and community. Examples of grassroots advocacy include meeting with and educating a member of the Virginia General Assembly, a member of Congress, or other policy makers on the impact of a specific policy matter.

As school board members, it is up to each of you to advocate for quality public education for all Virginia's students. Using a collective voice helps policy makers understand the issues that matter to school board members across the Commonwealth. It is important that policy makers hear from school board members so they can create and implement legislation that supports public education, families, and the communities each of you represent.

The possibilities are endless when it involves bringing legislators to your schools. Do not be afraid to be creative and think outside the box. Your legislators want to know what is happening in your school division.

VSBA Grassroots Advocacy

In all of your interactions with policymakers and staff remember these key points:

Stay positive and nonpartisan. Do not threaten a legislator (“I won’t vote for you if you don’t support this legislation.”)! It is important not to alienate your legislator because you may need his/her support on later issues. Keep the focus on public education.

Be personal. Visits to schools where you can share your divisions positives and concerns during a visit will lead to a more successful event because the legislator will have a visual take away from what they saw. Be sure to have a physical one pager that highlights your visit for the legislator or staff to take with them after the visit.

Be patient when getting to know legislators, especially if they are new to the Virginia General Assembly. Building relationships with your legislative delegation can require multiple interactions.

Stay on message. Focus your visit on one or two issues.

Avoid providing inaccurate information. It is far better to tell a legislator, “I don’t know, but I will find out and get back to you.” Your credibility (and the legislator’s if he/she uses your information) is at stake. Make sure to follow up with the complete information.

Have fun! Having your legislative delegation visit your school(s) is a great opportunity for all parties involved.



Alexandria City Public Schools hosted Senator Adam Ebbin, Delegate Charnelle Herring and Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker’s representative in 2023

Quick Tips & Suggestions

- Discuss what your school division or school would like to get out of a visit with a state legislator and phrase your invitation accordingly.
- Thank the legislator for their past support for public education.
- Help the legislator decide which activities and topics would be appropriate for specific 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 website 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 Director of Legislative Services, J.T. Kessler, at jason@vsba.org or 434-295-8722 ext. 116.



Prince George hosted Delegate Carrie Coyner



Washington County hosted Delegate Israel O'Quinn

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 *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 provide you an update on our progress. Our teachers are implementing new, research-based instructional strategies, and our students are using a variety of new technology methods such as _____. 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

News Release

For Immediate Release

[Insert Date]

Division Contact

[Insert Name, Title]

[Insert Phone Number]

[Insert E-mail]

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

[INSERT CITY/COUNTY NAME], VA - 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 schools and/or facilities
<TIME> Delegate/Senator Departure
Where: <INSERT LOCATION>
Contact: <INSERT SCHOOL DIVISION CONTACT>

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Sample Text for Board Proclamation

WHEREAS, it is critical that all students in Virginia are afforded the opportunity to receive a quality education in Virginia's public schools; and

WHEREAS, a strong and effective public-school system is essential to the economic prosperity of Virginia, and ensures that we continue to make social, technological, and scientific advancements; and

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

WHEREAS, Virginia's school boards play a critical role in fostering close relationships between schools and legislators to strengthen and improve Virginia's public education system; and

WHEREAS, the support of our legislators contributes significantly to the success and achievements of Virginia's public schools; and

WHEREAS; Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) Take Your Legislator to School Month serves as an opportunity to promote productive relationships between state legislators and their local education providers; and

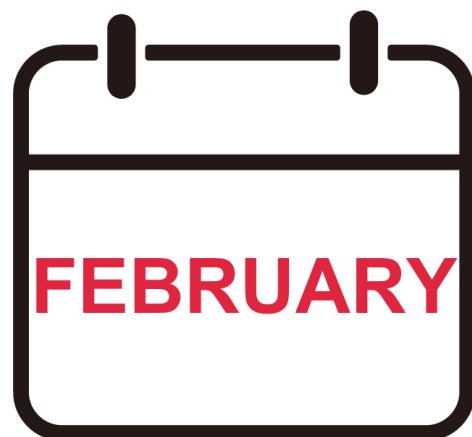
WHEREAS, VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month is also an opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the professionals working to strengthen Virginia's public schools.

Advocacy is Year-Round!



- Virginia General Assembly Legislative Session begins on the second Wednesday of the month.
- Attend VSBA Capital Conference.
- Hold meetings with local delegation on Capitol Square.
- Respond to VSBA Legislative Action Alerts.
- Review VSBA Legislative Update Blog.
- Attend weekly virtual legislative updates on Friday afternoons during session.

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- Attend weekly virtual legislative updates on Friday afternoons during session.
- Connect with local legislative delegation urging support for VSBA Legislative Priorities.
- Review VSBA Legislative Update Blog.



- Respond to VSBA Legislative Action Alerts.
- Review End-of-Session report from VSBA Government Relations Staff.
- VSBA solicits proposed new and amended legislative positions from local school boards for consideration by the Legislative Positions Committee in July.
- Conduct End-of-Session meetings with local legislative delegation.
- Attend local VSBA Regional Meeting.





- Virginia General Assembly returns for Reconvened Session to consider amendments to legislation by the Governor.
- Attend local VSBA Regional Meeting.

- Invite local legislative delegation to attend end-of-the-year special events.
- Highlight student and school division success stories and share with local legislative delegation.
- VSBA solicits nominations for the annual Advocate for Education Award from local school boards with the final Friday in July as the submission deadline.
- Invite local legislative delegation to attend commencement ceremonies.



- Invite local legislative delegation to attend end-of-the-year special events.
- Attend VSBA School Law Conference (date is sometimes in May).
- Proposed new or amended legislative positions from local school boards for consideration by the Legislative Positions Committee due on the first Monday of June.
- Invite local legislative delegation to attend commencement ceremonies.



- Highlight student and school division success stories and share with local legislative delegation.
- VSBA solicits nominations for the annual Advocate for Education Award from local school boards with the final Friday in July as the submission deadline.





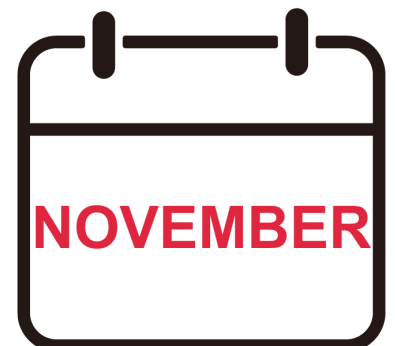
- Invite local legislative delegation to Back-to-School events.
- Begin planning November Take Your Legislator to School Month activities and send Save-the-Date notices to local legislative delegation.

- Attend VSBA Legislative Advocacy Conference.



- Adopt local legislative priorities to be shared with local legislative delegation during November Take Your Legislator to School Month activities.

- Participate in VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month activities.
- Attend the VSBA Annual Convention.
- Send a delegate from your Board to participate in the VSBA Delegate Assembly.



- Review VSBA Legislative Positions Handbook and Legislative Priorities.
- Continue meeting with local legislative delegation prior to beginning of January legislative season.

Understanding Virginia's Government

The Virginia General Assembly

The [Virginia General Assembly](#) is composed of two chambers- the Senate of Virginia and the Virginia House of Delegates. Each chamber has its own committee structure and elected leadership.

The Senate of Virginia consists of 40 members that are elected to serve four-year terms. The Virginia House of Delegates has 100 members that are elected to serve two-year terms. Members of the General Assembly may not hold any other elected public office during their term as a Senator or Delegate.

Pursuant to the Constitution, the General Assembly convenes for a Regular Session on the second Wednesday of January. In even-numbered years, the legislature meets for 60 calendar days and in odd-numbered years meets for 30 calendar days but is customarily extended to 46 calendar days. Occasionally, the legislature must extend beyond their projected ending date. In either an even-numbered or odd-numbered year, the legislature may not extend beyond an additional 30 calendar days. The legislature may be called into Special Session by the Governor at any time and may call itself into Special Session if two-thirds of the members elected to each house petition for a Special Session to be convened.

Since 1980, the legislature has constitutionally been required to convene a Reconvened Session on the sixth Wednesday after adjournment of any Session (Regular or Special). The purpose of the Reconvened Session is to consider any Governor's amendments or vetoes to legislation communicated to him for action. The Reconvened Session typically lasts one day; however, the Session may last three days and can be extended an additional seven days.

One of the primary responsibilities of the General Assembly during a legislative session is to enact a balanced budget. In even-numbered years, the General Assembly adopts a two-year or biennial budget. After the Governor, as the chief planning and budget officer, prepares the biennial budget; the General Assembly then modifies the budget accordingly. The General Assembly also increases or decreases proposed funding levels. In odd numbered years, the House and Senate address unexpected increases or decreases in revenue and modifies the budget accordingly.

The Constitution of Virginia and the Rules for procedure that each Chamber of the Virginia General Assembly adopt for session outline the process for which legislation can become law. Any member of the General Assembly can propose legislation. To assist in the process, proposed legislation generally begins with the Senator or Delegate meeting with the Division of Legislative Services where a staff attorney checks existing law and reviews the proposed legislation for any potential issues over its constitutionality. After this review, the proposed legislation is drafted by legislative services and upon completion, the Senator or Delegate signs their name to the legislation and files it with the Clerk of the respective chamber in which they serve.

The legislation is then referred by the Senate Clerk or the Speaker of the House to a Standing Committee. In the House of Delegates, there are 14 Standing Committees, while the Senate of Virginia has 11 Standing Committees.

Understanding Virginia's Government Cont.

The committee structure is an essential component of the legislative process because it is where the bulk of the General Assembly's work is done. While in Committee, the public has opportunity to provide testimony on the merits of the legislation. It is during the testimony and "mark-up" process that legislation is most easily amended prior to a full vote by the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee can vote to "approve" the legislation with or without amendments. If the legislation is approved by the Standing Committee, it heads to the floor for debate by the entire Senate or House chamber.

During session, the daily meetings, floor calendars, and legislation being considered can be accessed on the [Legislative Information System](#) website.

The Executive Branch

Virginia has three state-wide Constitutional offices, [Governor](#), [Lieutenant Governor](#), and [Attorney General](#). Each are elected to four-year terms and are charged with specific duties found in the Constitution of Virginia. The Governor is barred from serving consecutive four-year terms but can serve multiple terms in office. The Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General can serve consecutive terms with no limits.

Executive branch leaders enforce and implement laws passed by the Virginia General Assembly. The enforcement and implementation of laws is typically done through executive branch departments, agencies, boards, and commissions.

Executive branch departments, agencies, boards and commissions are authorized to issue regulations based on the legislative directive found in laws passed by the General Assembly. During this process, stakeholders are often consulted and asked to weigh in on a variety of proposed regulations.

After a regulation is proposed, it is published on the [Virginia Town Hall website](#) with an opportunity for public input by a certain deadline. The regulation may be the subject of multiple revisions and one or more administrative hearings. School board member input during this comment process is just as important as during the legislative process. Once the final version is published, the regulation is implemented. At any time, a department, agency, board, or commission may also subsequently update, revise, or rescind a regulation or any part of it, during which this comment process repeats.

Rules governing the regulatory process are found in [Virginia's Administrative Process Act](#).

Legislative Advocacy Important Links

Below are links to important resources that will assist with your advocacy efforts.

[Virginia School Boards Association Legislative Update Blog](#)

[Virginia General Assembly](#)

[The Senate of Virginia](#)

[The Virginia House of Delegates](#)

[Who's My Legislator?](#)

[Virginia's Legislative Information System](#)

[Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission](#)

[Code of Virginia](#)

[Virginia Department of Education](#)



Chesapeake City Schools hosted Senator Christie New Craig, Delegate N. Baxter Ennis, Delegate Jay Leftwich, Delegate Bonita Grace Anthony, Mr. Jackson Miller (Representing Senator L. Louise Lucas), Ms. Sheryl Moody-Reddington (Representing Delegate C. E. "Cliff" Hayes, Jr), and Mr. Nicholas Proffitt (Representing Attorney General Jason S. Miyares)



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