Tips for communicating with your legislators

• **Be unfailingly polite.** Refer to your Representative as Representative __________ and to your Senator as Senator __________, not Mr. or Mrs.

• **Even if your legislator is rude or confrontational, keep your cool.** For example, if you meet with someone who says “So you want to trap poor children in failing schools?” in a discussion of vouchers, an appropriate response would be something like “Actually, not all private schools are high performing, and we need the resources to fix those struggling public schools to benefit everyone.” Always offer to provide additional information if needed, and call our legislative staff if you need our help to put it together.

• **Always identify yourself as a constituent who votes.** For decades, the conventional wisdom has been that teachers don’t vote, and legislators aren’t concerned about the views of people who won’t bother to vote for — or against — them.

• **Let your legislators know that you’re paying attention and watching their education votes.** Don’t just accept statements that they’re “for teachers” — everyone is pro-public education during campaign season. Check out the bills they’re filing and the votes they’re taking.

• **If you have personal stories to concisely share that would help your legislator understand why something is a problem, use them.** Is your district cutting important programs because of funding problems? Did your talented colleague down the hall have to leave the profession because of insurance costs? Are the students suffering because your district is hiring uncertified or out-of-field teachers? Let your legislator know.

• **Find common ground if you can — it will make your legislator remember you and start creating a relationship.** Do you go to the same church? Did you teach his sister? Make a brief mention of that connection.

• **Thank the legislator for his or her time, and consider following up with a note.**

• **If you can’t meet with the legislator himself, meet with his or her aide or district office director.** Those meetings and a summary of them are almost invariably reported to the legislator.

Check out TCTA’s daily Capitol Updates at tcta.org, and make sure you’re signed up to receive the weekly eUpdates (https://goo.gl/Lwt91S). That’s where you’ll find specific bill numbers, details about the legislation being considered, and who’s doing what (and when and why) at the Capitol.