Recess Is Over! 10 Tips to Effectively Communicate with Legislators
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Now that the August recess is over, members of Congress are back in Washington D.C. tackling priorities for the busy months ahead. You can stay up-to-date with the issues CEC’s is following by regularly checking the Legislative Action Center.

The Top 10

The following 10 tips will help your message stand out among the hundreds that pour into a legislative office every day:

1. Establish Your Relevance
Clearly distinguish how you are connected to the district or state to your member of Congress. Your affiliation with CEC is just as important as your connection as a special educator, researcher, parent, administrator, professor, etc. It is important to make sure your member of Congress understands how the issues you’re discussing impact the people they represent.

2. Be Specific
Effective advocates always ask for something specific related to their position. This might include asking your legislator to cosponsor legislation or to send a letter in support of increased funding for a specific education program. Information about specific pieces of key legislation related to CEC’s advocacy efforts can be found on the Legislative Action Center.

3. Prioritize Your Requests
If you have many requests, and do not make your top priorities clear, the legislative office may have a difficult time in identifying how to spend staff resources to meet your requests. Let the office know which of your requests need the most immediate attention and why.

4. Share Briefing Materials
Provide your legislators with briefing materials related to what you’re discussing. We encourage you to use the CEC’s Issue Briefs on timely topics on Capitol Hill. Be sure to include your contact information so your legislator can use you as a reference when they need information related to the issues discussed.
5. Be Polite
Whether you are writing, calling or meeting in-person with your member of Congress, remember to always be polite. If you are unable to provide information, don't panic! Be sure to find the information requested and follow-up as promptly as possible.

6. Don't Put Negative Labels on Your Opponents
Refrain from negative labels and try to grant credibility to opposing views. Be sure to read through CEC’s Issue Briefs, and other resources to make sure you are conveying proper and up-to-date information. Unsure of CEC’s position? Email us!

7. Be Patient
Do not expect an immediate response when contacting your legislators. In many circumstances, the issue may be one that the member of Congress has not yet formed an opinion on, or that they need to gather more information on before answering. Therefore, it is ok to ask when an appropriate time is to follow up with the legislator’s office.

8. Let the Office Know How You Can Help
If you have expertise related to specific special and gifted education and early intervention policy issues, let your member of Congress and their staff know! They are always looking for experts on specific issues and you might be a tremendous resource for them.

9. Keep Notes
Make sure to keep thorough notes of the meeting and/or call. Any information you can share with CEC will be valued and appreciated. If you receive a specific reply with a request from a letter sent, we ask that you forward it to CEC’s Policy and Advocacy staff. Knowing how legislator’s view and prioritize specific issues helps CEC shape priorities in policy issues.

10. Follow-Up
Be sure to follow-up with your legislators! If you shared a specific policy issue with them, follow up with them to ask if they have reviewed briefing materials or have any questions you can further answer for them. Be sure to thank them for taking the time to talk, meet or respond to you.

Questions? Contact Katie Grady: katieg@cec.sped.org or 703-264-9498