

Recommendations for working with the General Assembly
Tips for Superintendents
December 5, 2018

Hello VSA Members,

The legislative session begins on January 9, 2019. Some individual superintendents and some regional groups have already scheduled meetings with members of the General Assembly. **VSA will host a webinar for VSA members titled “Working with Vermont General Assembly” on Monday, January 14 at 3:00 pm.** Registration and related information will be sent to you via email later this month. In the meantime, I wanted to share these recommendations and tips for working effectively with the General Assembly:

- 1) **Know who your elected representatives and senators are.** To support that knowledge, we have prepared a detailed list of legislators organized by supervisory union/district. This listing, available [here](#), provides contact information for all members of the General Assembly. This listing is in the [Members Only](#) section of the VSA website (Password: vsa2018) under “resources”. If you discover an error or omission, please notify Kristi Tate at ktate@vtvsa.org.
- 2) **Get to know your elected representatives and senators.** The legislative process is driven by information and connection. With respect to connection, it is very worthwhile to become familiar with your respective representatives and senators. If you don’t already have a working relationship with your legislators, it is a good idea to establish a connection **before** you reach out to them on specific issues. A simple introductory phone call, in-person greeting, or email such as: “Hello Representative Jones, this is Joanne Smith, Superintendent for the East Orchard School District. I wanted to wish you well for the upcoming legislative session and let you know that if you have an interest or question related to the school system or public education, I am always available to speak with you.” End the communication with your contact information.
- 3) **Stay up to date on bills and issues related to public education.** VSA and its partners in the Legislative Education Collaborative will be producing regular reports during the legislative session on bills and issues that gain prominence as the session unfolds. The reports will provide a lot of objective detail on education-related legislation under active consideration, and information about all bills introduced that touch on education-related issues. It is a good idea to review these reports as soon as possible after you receive them.
- 4) **Remember that VSA is a great resource to help foster a thorough understanding of education-related legislation and its implications for the school system that you serve.** Understanding the implications of legislation, prospects for passage and the “journey” that a bill may take toward enactment of a law is all work that VSA undertakes

during the legislative session. **If you have questions about a particular piece of legislation, please ask me (Jeff Francis) about it via email jfrancis@vtvsa.org or by telephone at 229-5834.**

- 5) If you are planning a meeting with legislators, please let VSA know. Contact Jeff and let him know what you have scheduled.** We can almost always provide information and context about a bill or bills, issue or issues, that will be useful in your meeting with legislators. Whether it is a very specific bill or the full slate of legislation that might affect schools, we can help you make your meeting with legislators more effective.
- 6) If you are contacted by a legislator about a specific bill (or if you decide to make contact on your own initiative) please check in with Jeff (even if it is after the fact).** The legislative process is dynamic, and it is useful to be up to the minute regarding State House happenings around a bill or issue that has your interest.
- 7) If VSA takes an official position on a piece of legislation, we will keep you informed about it.** As the legislative session progresses, it is customary for VSA to establish official positions on select pieces of legislation. That process usually involves a discussion of the bill at a VSA All-Members' Meeting or similar event with action by the membership or, in some instances, by the VSA Trustees. Also, sometimes VSA must take an immediate action/position related to a bill. In those instances, we work to check in with the membership or Trustees, as possible and appropriate.
- 8) You may be invited to testify on a bill, by the Association, by a Legislative Committee or by an individual representative or senator.** One benefit of getting to know your respective legislators is that you may be asked (or requested) to offer testimony. When that happens, VSA can also provide support in your preparation of testimony, by providing information, reviewing your testimony, advising "on the lay of the land. . ." for the specific bill under consideration.
- 9) For a refresher on how a bill becomes law, you can access a good tutorial on the website for the Vermont General Assembly at <https://legislature.vermont.gov/the-state-house/civic-education/how-a-bill-becomes-law/>.** You can also explore the General Assembly's website overall by starting at <https://legislature.vermont.gov/>.
- 10) Remember, the legislative process is driven by connection, information and communications. VSA looks forward to working with all of its members to make the 2019-2020 a success for you, the school systems that you serve, and for public education. Thank you.**

Jeff Francis
Executive Director