

Cafeteria Site Visits

One of the most effective ways to advocate for your school nutrition program is to invite a legislator or policymaker to participate in a cafeteria site visit for an up-close look at the successes and obstacles of providing meals to students every day.

How to Conduct a Cafeteria Site Visit

Before the visit:

- Review your program calendar and choose some tentative dates where there will be some activity for the legislator to view.
- Try to schedule a visit during a District Work Period. If possible, try to pick a day when the legislator will have the most significant contact with kids or parents.
- Call, email, or send a letter to your legislator's office and ask to speak to the scheduler.
- Let the legislator's scheduler know that you would like him/her to tour your facility.

During the visit:

- Arrange for a team of folks (3-4) to do the tour of your facility, choose a board member or someone with whom your legislator may have a good relationship.
- Create a team that could answer a range of questions about your schools and your school district.
- Make the legislator feel comfortable asking questions. Do not expect the legislator to know much about your program.
- Give basic information on your work and encourage questions, even tough ones. When giving the tour spend the time describing your work, not "lobbying."
- Explain your role and daily tasks rather than what you want the legislator to do (make time for this later in the visit). The legislator should understand what you do and why it essential.

After the visit:

- After the tour, make time for discussion. Find a place where you can sit down with the legislator and get their reactions to what they saw.
- If you don't know the answer to any question, let the legislator know that you will get back to them with a response. Ask for the name and information of the staffer that should receive the information.
- During the discussion, make sure the legislator knows how decisions made at the state and federal level affect your work.
- Feel free to discuss with the legislator changes to regulations and budget issues. Try to gauge the level of commitment from your legislator before he/she leaves. Example: commitment to support funding, a commitment to read more information on an issue, a commitment to meet with you again, etc.
- Thank the legislator for their time at the beginning and end of your site visit. Send a final thank you letter afterwards; this helps to maintain communication and ensure that the legislator recognizes you as a resource.

Tips:

- Check out additional SNA [Cafeteria Site Visit Resources](#).
- Legislators' schedules are often very tight, be flexible when scheduling a visit.
- Remember: site tours appeal to legislators because it is a somewhat informal meeting.
- A visit can help the legislator see how government investment and community participation work to improve the lives of children.