

A Legislative Guide for CTSO Students

Attending Missouri ACTE/CTSO Legislative Day

February 13, 2008



The Missouri ACTE Legislative Committee welcomes the students and advisors of your Missouri Career & Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) to participate in Missouri ACTE/CTSO Legislative Day to be held on Wednesday, February 13, 2008, in Jefferson City, Missouri. We hope that state, district, and school student CTSO members along with their advisors will be able to attend. We hope to inspire new leaders and encourage communication with legislators.

All students participating in Legislative Day must be accompanied by his/her CTSO advisor while in the Capitol. The students should have received legislative training on appropriate behavior and protocol prior to February 13 to include the items listed below. CTSO members are expected to wear their organization's appropriate uniform including the organization's jacket and other traditional attire. It is important that we present a professional appearance.

Advocacy for Career and Technical Education is very important. Your legislators want to hear your opinions as they represent you in Jefferson City.

We are sorry but there will be no reimbursement for expenditures such as gasoline, meals, or overnight stays.

The following are some important details in preparing for your visits:

1. State Legislators. Each resident of Missouri has one State Representative and one State Senator. The goal is for each student to visit with his or her Representative and Senator during the visit. Going with your group of students and advisor will make the visit more comfortable if it is your first time of visiting your legislators. If you do not know who these individuals are, please check online at <http://www.senate.state.mo.us/>. Select "Legislative Information" or "Legislative Lookup." Also, each legislator should have an information page about him or her. Print it out and be familiar with some additional information about the legislator to help with conversation during the appointment. Also be familiar with the name of the legislative aide or administrative assistant in the office. This information should be available at the information desk on the first floor of the Capitol if you are unable to determine it previously. Check your notes just prior to going in so that you will be familiar with their name(s). Also, sometimes maps can be incorrect as legislators change offices.
2. Appointments. Advisors/students should make appointments with the legislators with whom they are going to visit at least *two weeks* in advance of your visit if possible. Be aware that your appointment may be with a legislative aide, who is a very important individual in the office and helps to make many recommendations. Have a time in mind when you call for your appointment. Follow up with a confirmation phone call one to two days prior to the visit to make sure there are no changes. This is important. Many times, things will change at the last minute and your legislator may not be able to meet as planned. The legislator may need to attend an important, previously unscheduled meeting that he or she was unaware of when your appointment was made.
3. Be Gracious, Be Gracious, Be Gracious. It is important to be respectful of all legislators. Do not make negative comments based on whether the person is a Democrat or a Republican. It is important that you create an atmosphere of respect and mutual admiration during your visit. Your goal is to inform the legislators of the importance of Career and Technical Education. Rarely do you find a legislator who does not support educational issues. It is also important that you be convincing and persuasive in your demeanor.
4. Meeting the Legislator/Aide. Due to the fact that the legislators are very busy and may have to be in a committee meeting or on the Senate or House floor, brief meetings may be necessary with your legislators

in the hallways rather than in the offices. This often occurs. Go in a group to the appointment if several students have the same legislator in your group. Be sure to arrive a few minutes early and be prepared to wait in case your legislator is not immediately available. Your legislator(s) may want to introduce you on the House or Senate floor. Please allow time to do this if he or she asks you. Do not space your appointments too close together.

5. Introductions. Students should be prepared to introduce themselves and their advisor and shake hands firmly and professionally. As introductions are made, clearly say your name, your career and technical education school's name, and the course in which you are enrolled. Explain the name of your student organization--not just say the acronym. Explain what you do in the organization. (It is likely that they will not be familiar with it.) You should also shake hands at the conclusion of the meeting and thank the legislator/legislative aide for their time in speaking with them. Practice this before arriving. Use good eye contact, smile, and do not use inappropriate language (including slang, cursing, mumbling). Use complete sentences and speak positively. Leaders (like yourself) speak in positive tones. Do not use this as an opportunity to complain. Please remove rings from nontraditional piercings and cover visible tattoos. In addition, it is very important to make your conversation nonpartisan. Legislators enjoy meeting students. Remember, legislators are humans too. They are there to serve their constituents, and you are one of them. Refer to the Legislator as Representative (Last Name) or Senator (Last Name).
6. Packets. Each student/participant will receive a packet of information from Missouri ACTE during the briefing at 8 a.m. which includes several copies of a brochure to be given at each legislator's office. It is only necessary to leave one brochure at each office you visit. If you have brochures remaining when you are done, they may also be used as informative documents for other community dignitaries who need a better understanding of Career and Technical Education. Be sure, however, that you have enough for the visits you are making prior to leaving the meeting. Be familiar with the few, brief, important talking points from the brochure that are discussed at the morning meeting with Bill Gamble and Sarah Topp so that you will be able to share that information during your appointments. Please take notes during the briefing session and ask questions if you are not clear on the key points. It is very important to handle yourself maturely in the briefing. Legislative Day is one of the most important events of the year for Missouri ACTE members and should be taken in a serious manner.
7. Sharing Information with your Legislators. After introductions, be specific and concise in telling your legislator what you want. Briefly describe the issue(s). Be honest. Give both sides of the issue, if possible. Do not imply facts or authority you do not possess. Students should be prepared to verbally share with their legislator(s) the importance of Career Education, and what they are learning in their class. If there is a bill in particular, tell them the number. (Be aware that there are House bills and Senate bills. They are more interested in the bill that affects them. As an example, if he or she is a Senator, the legislator is more knowledgeable/interested in Senate bills. Please be aware of the bill process before you arrive.) Each student/constituent in the group should have something to add to the conversation. A ten-minute visit is the normal average length. It is important not to overstay your welcome. Speak rationally and professionally; emotionalism is not appropriate. Explain how the issue affects the general public, his or her constituents, and/or you and your organization as well as your friends, relatives, or neighbors. Be familiar with important issues in your community that affect your school (as an example, business closings that may have caused an influx of additional adult students). If you do not have an answer to a question, say so, but tell the legislator you will get back with an answer—then do so promptly. Be sure to leave your name, address, and phone number.

Open your Missouri ACTE brochure and use it as the focal point as you speak for your key talking points during your visit to each office. Be sure and write a brief "Thank you for your support." with your name and school on the brochure whether or not you get to speak with the legislator or aide. (Sometimes, there will be no one in the office.) If you have business cards, leave one at each office you visit as a reminder you were there; attach it to the brochure provided to you.

It is appropriate to also take a brochure about your career/technical education school and the programs it offers. Be sure to speak about the skills and academic knowledge that you are gaining from your class. Your legislator may also be interested in your future aspirations after school, so be prepared with a positive response. You might also want to mention what some other graduates are doing from your Career and Technical School as far as job placement, joining the military, or continuing related education.

It is also important to stick to the issues. Please do not bring up something on a totally different subject during the conversation. Your purpose is to represent students of Missouri Career and Technical Education.

8. VERY IMPORTANT: Invite your Legislator(s) to Visit and Tour your School and Provide Information if Needed. At the conclusion of your visit, offer to be of assistance to the legislator in the future, if information is needed. Very importantly, invite the legislator(s) to come and visit your school and your classroom. Confirm a date with your school's director prior to going to Legislative Day so that it will work out for all those concerned. Try to set a date, if possible. If this is not possible, call the legislator's office in the future. (You may have to ask several times before they are able to attend—or you may need to wait until they have time available in their schedule.) It is important not to give up after one or two requests for them to visit. During the session, they may only be able to visit your school/class on a Friday. Each year the legislative session traditionally lasts from January through May. The legislators also attend meetings throughout the year in Jefferson City—so it may be somewhat difficult to book a visit/tour for a few weeks or months.
9. Pictures. (*This is optional*) Take a camera(s) so that you may take a picture of you with your legislator or aide. Put that picture in your school's newsletter and local newspaper. A digital photo is usually best. Provide a press release with your photo(s); this is great for public relations. Send a copy of the article to the legislator when it appears in the school or local newsletter/newspaper or the state CSO newsletter. Send the picture and story to the press in a timely manner (within a day or two if possible).
10. Other Behaviors. Gum chewing, loudness, rudeness, running, and immature attention-getting actions are inappropriate. Turn your cell phones/pagers off while in the Capitol. Do not talk on them during your visit or while you are waiting. You want to be remembered as a positive leader making a difference. Stand tall. If you go into the House or Senate gallery, sit quietly and listen.
11. Thank You Letter/Note. Send a thank you letter or note to each legislator when you return home. It is very important to try to develop a relationship with your legislator and continued communication is important, starting with a thank you. See www.mo-acte.org under Mentor-a-Legislator if you need help with an example of a thank you letter for a visit. Be sure to pick up a business card from each office so you will have up-to-date information about their phone numbers, etc.
12. Report to Missouri ACTE Office. Please email Donna Vossen of the success of your visit and with whom you spoke. Please mail, email, or fax the information with any pictures to Donna Vossen within approximately one week of your visit (by February 21).
13. Communicate with your Legislators in the Future. Thank them for voting on certain issues which you support or let them know how much you appreciate their efforts for your district. You may see www.mo-acte.org for Mentor-a-Legislator sample letters that you may personalize.
14. Attend Local Activities/Forums in your Community. Attend local activities where your state senator or representative speaks in your home town. Your participation is appreciated. Be sure to go up and introduce yourself at some point during the activity—usually at the end.
15. Legislator's Visit to Your School. When the legislator does come for a tour of your building, invite the press with a press release, and take photos yourself for your school newsletter, the Missouri ACTE Reporter newsletter, your local newspaper, and your student organization's state newspaper if possible. Greet the legislator at the door with your CTSO's officers. Have the tour and a speaker predetermined for each room. A tour of approximately one hour is appropriate. (The legislators usually have many stops to

make when they are not in session.) Photos with students in the shop areas are the best ones to take, but be sure you have the clearance of the school/student to use the student's photo. If in doubt, take the picture with the instructor in front of equipment. Present the legislator with a certificate of appreciation or a resolution in his/her honor from the school. Allow the legislator to speak if he or she wishes.

If you have any questions, please contact Donna Vossen (Missouri ACTE Executive Director) at 573.634.7366 (phone) 573.636.7142 (fax) or donna@mo-acte.org. The Missouri ACTE address is PO Box 1955, Jefferson City, MO 65102.

You can make a difference!

Missouri ACTE Legislative Committee
Rusty Black, Chair