

**Partnership for
a Healthy Texas**

Conquering Obesity

6 HELPFUL HINTS FOR MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

1. **Be professional, positive, and polite.**

Approach your meeting at the Capitol the way you would any meeting where you want to show respect. Dress professionally or “business casual,” be on time, and speak respectfully (e.g., avoid arguments). If you meet with a staff person instead of the legislator you expected, be positive. After all, this person has a lot of sway over your elected official’s decisions—and can be a great person to know!

2. **Introduce yourself, including where you are from and your story.**

Lawmakers and their staff listen to constituents. Be sure to say you are from the representative or senator’s district. Additionally, one of the most effective ways you as a parent can make your case is to share a story about why child obesity is a concern to you. You don’t have to know everything about a policy proposal: you simply need to know your story about why it matters. . . and commit to telling it!

3. **Be sure to make your ask.**

You came to the Capitol to ask for a policy change or support for something, so don’t forget to do it! It is easy to get sidetracked with chit-chat, but be sure to follow through on what you came to the Capitol to do. Practice the request you will be making of your legislator beforehand, and promise yourself you won’t leave the room until you have made that ask.

4. **Save your “leave-behind” papers for the end of the meeting.**

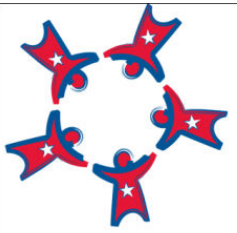
You have material to leave with the person you are meeting with. During the meeting they should be focused on you and what you are saying, though, so wait to give out these materials until the end of your meeting.

5. **It’s OK to say, “I don’t know, but I can have someone from the Partnership for a Healthy Texas get back to you on that.”**

If you get a question you don’t know the answer to, that’s OK! In your packet is a form for reporting back to the Partnership for a Healthy Texas any follow-up we need to make. Simply write down questions you get that you are unable to answer, and we will be happy to follow up for you.

6. **If you make a visit, send a thank you note.**

Please send a thank you note to the person you met with to thank them for their time and reinforce your message!



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TALKING POINT TIPS FOR WHAT YOU CAN SAY TO YOUR REP

Research says there are some really effective ways to talk about child obesity. Below we offer a summary of the recommendations, plus bulleted comments in blue that give you an idea of how to say it. Use your own words in your meeting, and follow the pointers below to help make a strong case to your representative.

Most people don't understand the role of the environment – not just the individual—in obesity. They are open to the idea, though so it is very important that this becomes the dominant “frame” in advocacy.

- “Doctors and researchers have found the environment around a person plays a big role in that person’s chances of being obese.”

Linking obesity prevention to children increases support.

- “Where kids have good nutrition and more opportunities to exercise, whole communities benefit. Studies show kids in these places stay healthier, do better in school, and are less likely to get into trouble. Unfortunately, many Texas kids are growing up in the wrong kind of environment. Texas has one of the country’s highest child obesity rates.”

Point to past successes. Build up pride that Texas has been a leader for obesity policy before.

- “In prior years, the legislature had done a great job addressing obesity in our schools and state. Among southern states, we are leading the way toward solving this crisis. The CATCH program in El Paso, in fact, was linked to the biggest drop in child obesity rates ever on record.”

Instead of saying “not to cut” something, ask to “maintain funding.” Point out that letting obesity worsen costs a lot more money than these programs.

- “Obesity is already causing skyrocketing costs for government and Texas businesses alike. If we do nothing, those costs will go much higher. Maintaining funds for school health programs brings down those costs.”

Focus on how doing nothing or doing less in the next budget cycle for obesity is, in fact, the costliest alternative for Texas.

- “This is a critical moment for obesity prevention, and we can’t give up the fight. Will you maintain funds for programs that really work at preventing obesity in our schools and communities?”



QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT BE ASKED

Shouldn't we just tell people to eat reasonably and turn off the TV?

There aren't many people who have not heard that message. Yet our obesity problem isn't getting better. What needs to be better understood is that the world around us—our foods, drinks, and communities—changed in the past few decades. Today, what is easiest and most affordable—like fast food or overlooking the role of health programs in schools—isn't in the best interest of kids or Texas.

Unlike preaching, policy changes have proven effective at preventing obesity. For example:

- When more elementary schools nationwide banned the sale of sugary drinks and junk food earlier this decade obesity rates in young children declined.
- Programs like Safe Routes to School, which helps ensure there are sidewalks and other safe passageways for kids, have been linked to significant increases in physical activity for children.
- Texas's own Coordinated Approach To Child Health (CATCH) Community program reduced obesity among children in studies in El Paso and in Central Texas.
- The Texas Public School Nutrition Policy, which limits the portion sizes of high-fat, high-sugar items at schools, led to documented reductions in soft drink, candy, and dessert consumption at Texas middle schools.

Can we fix this problem just with exercise?

No. We have to look at nutrition, too. Kids are taking in more extra calories than they can burn off. We support a plan that makes exercise simple and safe in communities. It should be part of every-day routines at school and child care settings. It also needs to be combined with measures to improve what children eat and drink.

What would you say to my constituents who say, 'It's nobody's business what my kids eat or whether they exercise'?

This doesn't take choices away. It simply lets more kids exercise safely and conveniently, and increases schools 'and communities' ability to provide healthy foods and drinks.

Also, there are public health costs that make child obesity everyone's problem. Rising expenses in our health care system and for programs we all pay for like Medicaid are tied to the obesity epidemic. For the population—and especially for children who will be our future workforce—there is a need to address obesity in a way that recognizes it as a public health issue.

We need to respond, just as we did with earlier public health issues (e.g., getting lead paint out of buildings, reducing tobacco consumption, tackling drunk-driving, etc.)



EXAMPLES OF “ASKS” TO CONCLUDE YOUR LEGISLATIVE MEETING

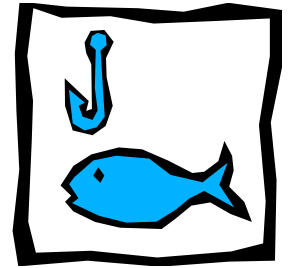
Policy Goal	How to ask for it
<i>Improve health in schools.</i>	<p>“Will you support requiring School Health Advisory Councils to review and recommend guidelines for vending and a la carte offerings in schools?</p> <p>“Will you support a study by TSHAC on the impact of advertising in schools?”</p> <p>“Will you support restoring health education and additional PE as a high school graduation requirement?</p>
<i>Ensure the built environment supports physical activity.</i>	<p>“Will you support more “complete streets” projects—roads with sidewalks and bikeways, so they’re safe for pedestrians and bicyclists, too?”</p>
Promote nutrition and fitness in early childhood.	<p>“Will you support having Texas follow national guidelines for healthy child care environments?”</p>
<i>Increase access to healthy foods.</i>	<p>“Will you support policies that bring farmers’ markets and grocery stores to communities and that get more fresh produce to schools?”</p>
<i>Curb obesity’s costs.</i>	<p>“Will you support maintaining funding for programs that are helping schools lower childhood obesity rates?”</p>



IN YOUR LEGISLATIVE MEETING: USE THE “HOOK, LINE, SINKER” APPROACH

Hook: *Say who you are*

Include your name and where you live



Line: *Provide your personal story and concern for obesity.*

Obesity is an issue that matters a lot to me because. . .

Sinker: *Make your request (“the ask”).*

Representative or Senator, please support . . .



LEGISLATIVE MEETING/CALL REPORT-BACK FORM

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO MSMITH@TEXASHEALTHINSTITUTE.ORG

Your Name: _____ Legislator: _____

Who did you speak with? (If staff, please provide name): _____

What did you ask for? _____

What response did you receive? _____

Were there questions that got asked or issues that came up you were unable to address? (If so, someone from the Partnership can follow up for you on them) _____

Any other things that came up you want to share? _____