



Families for Alternative Instruction rights in South Dakota

Civics Guide

A Guide to Civics in South Dakota

2026



The 2021 legislative session brought about positive changes for Alternative Instruction, the category encompassing homeschooling as defined by South Dakota Law. We witnessed the remarkable influence that a small, dedicated group can wield within our state government. We are blessed with the freedoms we enjoy, but it remains our duty to safeguard them diligently.

As conscientious citizens of South Dakota, active engagement in state, county, and local government is imperative. Our desire is for our voices to resonate and impact the decision-makers who shape our laws.

This guide was designed to help you become familiar with our state government, with a particular focus on the legislature.

Here, you will:

- Stay informed about legislative dates and activities.
- Gain the know-how to effectively communicate with your legislators.
- Sharpen your communication skills.
- Cultivate your critical thinking skills.
- Discover opportunities at Homeschool Day at the Capitol and as a Page.

Consider this guidebook as your passport to making your visit to the South Dakota State Capitol an unforgettable experience. It is our hope that through this exposure, you will be inspired to pursue a role in public office and become an integral contributor to our great state's legislative processes.

May God bless our endeavors and may you have fun learning and using your new skills!

Families for Alternative Instruction Rights in South Dakota (FAIRSD)



FAIRSD Committee Board Members: Lisa Fisher, Nancy Dennert, Mary Weinheimer, Aaron Schrader, Kate Thomas, Rachel Vogt and Dustin Collins, and Julie Christian (Ex Officio)

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South Dakota Legislative Procedures

It is important to have a basic understanding of South Dakota Legislative Procedures. Read through the following information to gain a better understanding of the South Dakota Legislature.

South Dakota Government Basics

The government of South Dakota, like the federal government, is divided into three distinct branches. The legislative branch makes the laws, the executive branch carries out the laws, and the judicial branch interprets the laws.

The South Dakota Legislature is bicameral, or composed of two bodies or chambers. The two bodies are the Senate and the House of Representatives. Thirty-five members make up the Senate and seventy members make up the House of Representatives.

Sessions are held annually and commence on the second Tuesday in January. The Legislature may also be convened in special session by the presiding officers of both houses upon the written request of two-thirds of the members of each house, or by the Governor.

Legislators:

All Legislators are elected by the constituents in the state's 35 districts, one senator and two representatives from each district. Legislators must be qualified voters in their legislative district, at least twenty-one years old, a citizen, and resident of the state for two years immediately preceding the election. Terms are for two years and members can only serve four consecutive terms in each house.

The South Dakota Constitution limits the Legislative Session to 40 days each year, with the final day reserved for Governor vetoes.

Caucus:

Caucus is a meeting of members of each political party of the House and the Senate, that exists to discuss issues of mutual concern and possibly to perform legislative research and policy planning for its members.

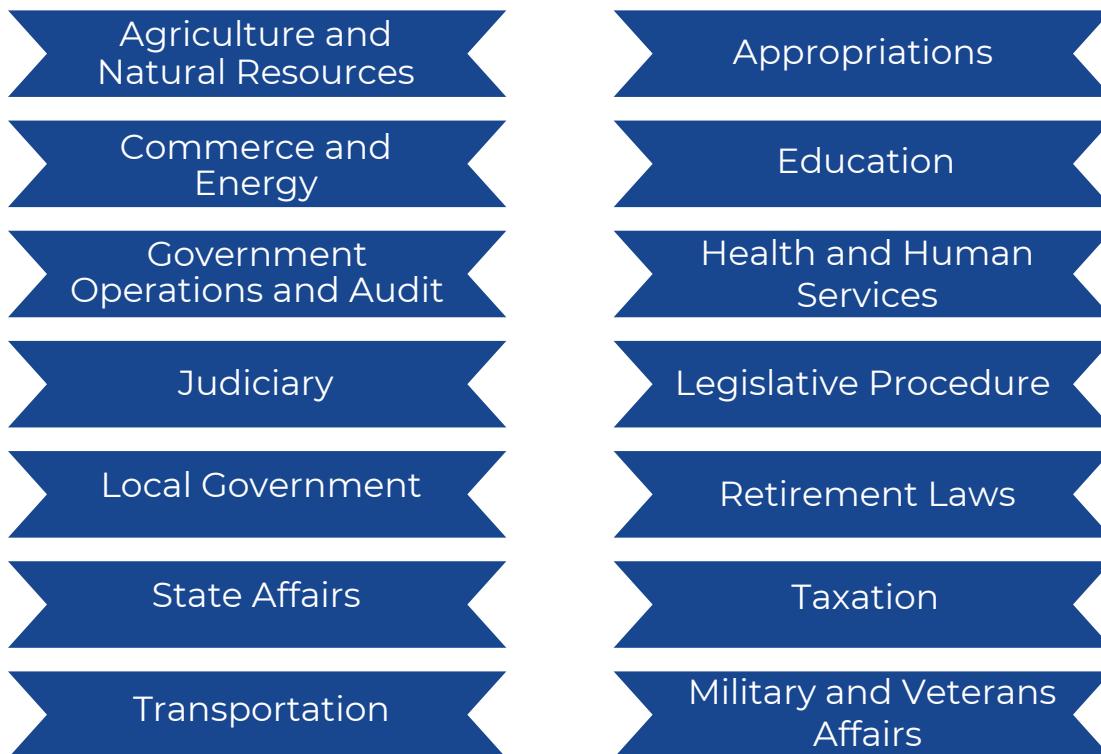
In South Dakota, the Democrat Party holds an open caucus which you are able to observe. The Republican Party holds a closed caucus.

Caucus is normally held one-hour prior to the start of session daily.

Committees:

Sub-committees formed within each chamber, which take public testimony and vote on bills with similar subjects. In the Senate, most committees consist of seven to nine members and in the House there are 13-15 members.

Fourteen standing committees in each chamber:



The Senate Pro Tempore and the Speaker of the House assign bills to committees to hear public testimony. The committee may make a recommendation on the bill:

- Do Pass: The committee recommends passage of the original bill.
- Do Pass as Amended: The committee recommends the bill pass, but in an altered form set by the committee.
- Send to 41st Day: This kills the bill because constitutionally there are only 40 days in the South Dakota Legislative Session.
- Without Recommendation: The committee cannot come to a consensus so they feel the entire legislative body should determine whether it should pass or fail.

Floor:

If a bill makes it out of committee it is then presented before the entire legislative body.

See page 4 "How a Bill Becomes a Law" for more details.

Session Calendar

The 2026 SD Legislative Session is slated for 38 days.

101st Legislative Session 2026

January 13th: Session Opens at Noon (CST)/ State of the State

January 14th: State of the Judiciary and State of the Tribes

February 4th: Last day for introduction of individual bills and resolutions.

February 5th: Last day for introduction of committee bills and resolutions.

February 24th: Last day to pass bills or joint resolutions by the house of origin (Crossover Day).

March 9th: Last day for a bill or joint resolution to pass both houses.

March 30th: Reserved for consideration of gubernatorial vetoes. Last day of session.

For more details about the South Dakota Legislative session calendar visit: <https://mylrc.sdlegislature.gov/api/documents/251214.pdf>

— How a Bill Becomes a Law —



- A bill is simply an idea that someone would like to see become law.
- It could be anything from the penalty for committing a crime to the amount of money that can be spent on a state program.
- The idea can come from anyone, but only a State Representative or State Senator can take the idea and guide it to final passage through the State Legislature.



- The drafting of the idea into a bill is done by the Legislative Research Council, the permanent, nonpartisan staff of the Legislature.
- A bill may be filed by any member of the House or Senate, and generally more than one legislator will sponsor a bill. The legislator whose name appears first on the bill is the “prime sponsor.”



- A bill is given to the Chief Clerk of the House or the Secretary of the Senate and is assigned a number. If the bill is sponsored by a Senator, it is a Senate Bill. If the bill is sponsored by a Representative, it is a House Bill.
- The bill is given a First Reading in the “House of Origin”. The “House of Origin” is the chamber that sponsored the bill.
- At a First Reading the bill’s number and title are read aloud.
- The Senate President, Pro Tempore, or Speaker of the House then assigns the bill to a committee.



- A committee’s responsibility is to examine a bill carefully, take testimony for and against the bill, and decide what to do with the bill.
- The committee has the following options:
 - Send the bill to the floor with a “Do Pass” recommendation,
 - Amend,
 - “Table” the bill, which kills the bill, unless the full body orders the committee to send the bill to the floor (“Smoke-Out”), or
 - Defer the bill to the 41st Day, which also kills the bill.



- If a bill reaches the floor, it is debated and voted on by the body.
- If it passes, the bill is sent to the other body, where it goes through the same introduction and committee processes.



- If a bill passes both the House and Senate, it is sent to the Governor.
- If signed by the Governor, the bill becomes law.
- If vetoed by the Governor, the Legislature has an opportunity to decide whether to override or uphold the veto.
- If the Legislature succeeds in overriding the veto, the bill becomes law.

Legislative Terms

Amendment - any alteration made or proposed to a bill, motion, or clause thereof by adding, changing, substituting, or omitting.

Appropriation – money set apart for formal action for a specific use.

Bicameral – a legislature consisting of two chambers.

Bill - a proposed law introduced during a session for consideration by the Legislature.

Co-sponsor - a joint sponsor of a bill or resolution.

Calendar - a list of bills or other items reported out of committee for consideration by the legislative body.

Chair - a traditional designation of the current presiding officer.

Debate - a formal discussion on a particular topic in a public legislative assembly, in which opposing arguments are put forward.

District - the geographic division of the state represented by a legislator.

Enacting Clause - that portion of a bill indicating that all following material is to become law. By constitutional provision each proposed law must be preceded by this clause: “BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA.”

Floor – a traditional description of the interior of either house; “floor action” describes the consideration of measures by the entire membership of the respective chamber.

Hoghouse - a procedure used in the Legislature whereby a committee or a member from the floor will move to strike everything after the enacting clause of a bill and insert in lieu thereof the substance of an entirely new bill.

Interim – the interval between regular sessions of the Legislature.

Lobbyist – an individual engaged to present and promote the views of a group, organization or industry on measures under consideration by legislators.



Majority Leader – the leader of the caucus of the majority party.

Majority Party - a group of legislators of the same political party who have the greatest number of elected members and who control the leadership positions.

Majority Vote - a number or percentage of votes equaling more than half of the total number of members to pass legislation. For the House that is 36 votes, and the Senate is 18 votes.

Minority Leader – the leader of the caucus of the minority party.

Minority Party - a group of legislators of the same political party who have the fewest number of elected members.

President - a title given to the presiding officer of the Senate held by virtue of the office of Lieutenant Governor.

President Pro Tempore - a Senator elected by the Senate, who is the constitutionally recognized officer of the Senate who presides over the chamber in the absence of the President.

Prime sponsor - the legislator or legislative committee introducing a bill.

Procedures - the rules and traditional practices of the Legislature.

Sergeant at Arms - the chief security officer of the Legislature, the sergeant at arms helps to preserve order in both chambers and the galleries.

Session – period during which the Legislature meets. Special Session - a period when the legislative body convenes outside of the normal legislative session.

Smoke Out – invoking joint rule 7-7 whereby one-third of the members of a house can require a committee to deliver a bill to the full body by the next legislative day.

Speaker - presiding officer of the House of Representatives, elected by the members of the House, at the beginning of each session.

Speaker Pro Tempore - a Representative elected by the House of Representatives, who is the constitutionally recognized officer of the House who presides over the chamber in the absence of the Speaker.

Two-Thirds Majority - a super majority vote requiring two-thirds of the members to pass legislation. For the House that is 47 votes, and the Senate is 24 votes.

Whip - a legislator elected by members of the political party to assist party leadership.

Overview of Session

Your Guide to the Legislative Research Council Website

<https://sdlegislature.gov>

The LRC website contains all the information necessary to contact your legislators and follow along with the Legislative Session.

Some of the information you will find on the website includes:

- “Find My Legislator”
- Proposed Bills
- Committee Meeting schedule, livestream and recording
- My LRC+
- Current SD Codified Laws

The best way to become familiar with the website is to **explore**.

LRC Website homepage
<https://sdlegislature.gov/>

Legislator Contact Information:

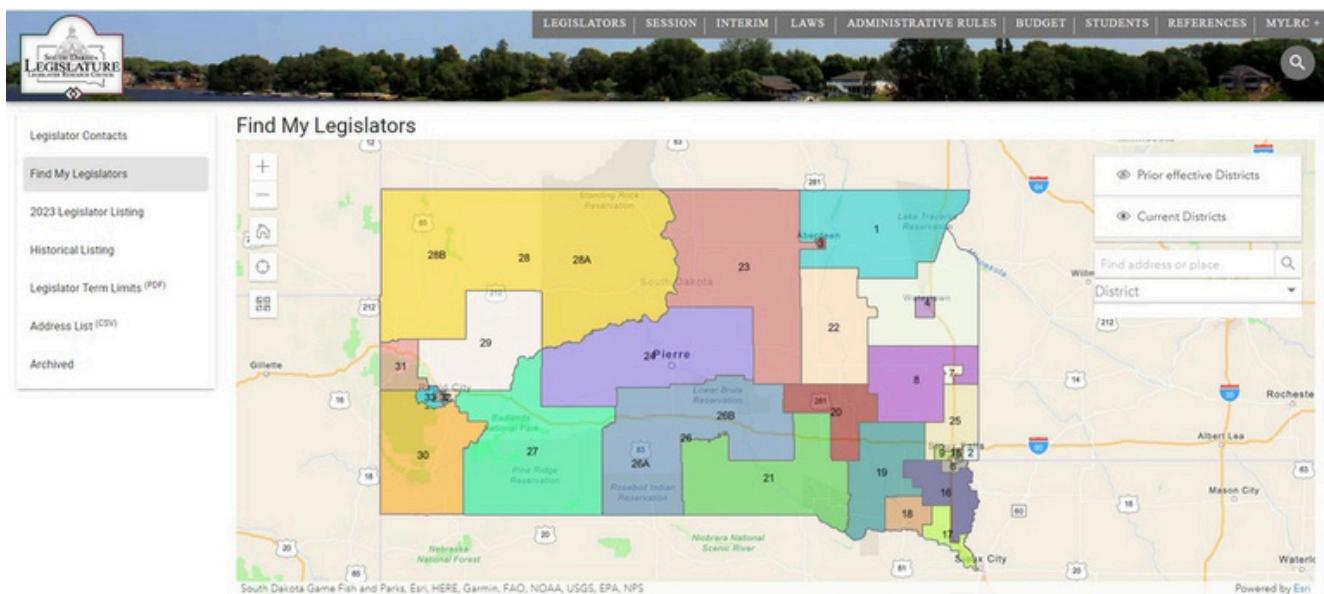
There are options on how to navigate the contact information for your Legislators.

#1: 2026 Legislators

- If you know who your legislators are, click the “2026 Legislators” tile on the home screen of the LRC Website.
- On the left-hand side panel click on Legislator Contacts
- Legislators are organized alphabetically by last name. Scroll down to your legislator.
- Basic contact information is on this page.
- Click “view profile” to see all their information.

#2: Find My Legislators

- At the top of the home screen, hover over “Legislators” until a drop down menu appears and then click “Find my Legislators.”
- On the next screen, you will then be able to search for who your legislators are by searching by address or your legislative district number. You may also click on the map if you know which district you live in.



- Once you have entered search criteria, your three Legislators will pop up on the screen.
- From there, you can click their names to navigate to their individual profiles.

Legislator Profiles:

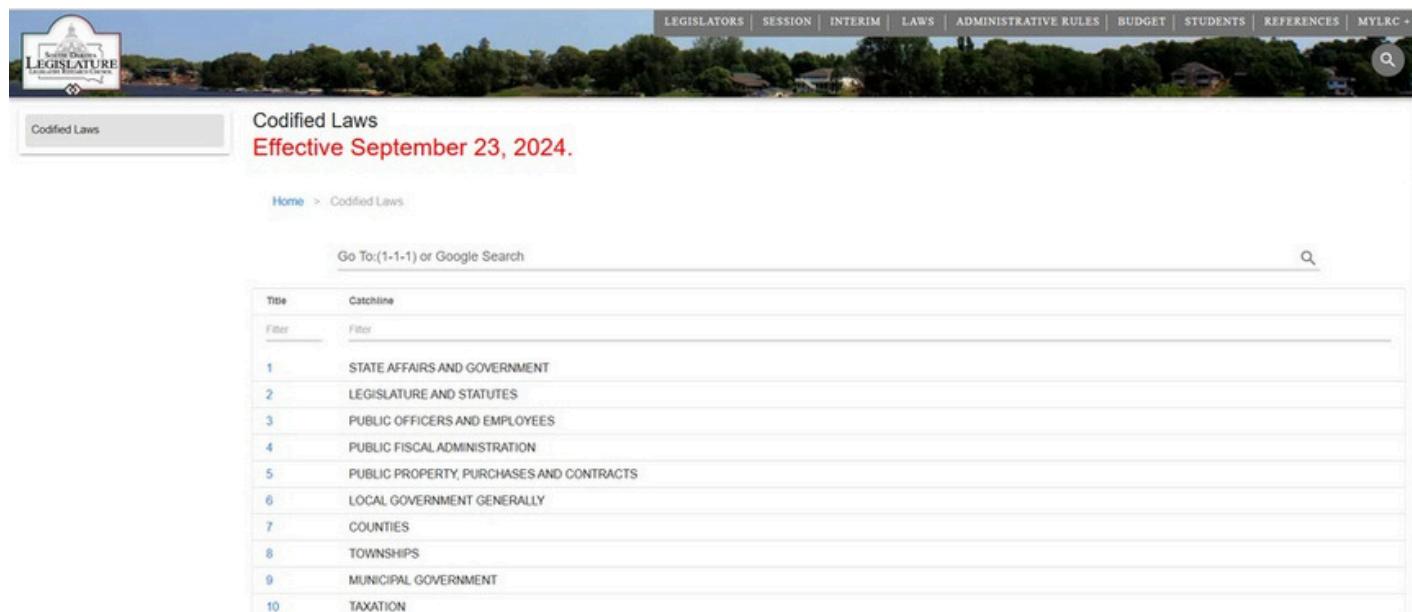
- These pages will give you all the contact information needed in order to reach your elected official.

You may also click on:

- Committees: to learn what committees your legislator is on and when they meet.
- Bills: to see what bills your legislator has sponsored or co-sponsored.
- Hearings: to see what bills your legislator is sponsoring have been scheduled for hearing and when they will be heard.

Codified Laws:

- To visit this section, click the “Codified Laws” tile on the LRC Homepage.
- These are laws that have been adopted by the Legislature, signed by the Governor and have gone into effect. You may need to use this section to see referenced sections of law in bills or to look up a topic you are interested in.
- Laws can be searched by topic or by statute number.



The screenshot shows the South Dakota Legislature Codified Laws page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for LEGISLATORS, SESSION, INTERIM, LAWS, ADMINISTRATIVE RULES, BUDGET, STUDENTS, REFERENCES, and MYLRC+. Below the navigation bar is a banner image of a lake and trees. On the left, there is a sidebar with a 'Codified Laws' button. The main content area displays the following text:

Codified Laws
Effective September 23, 2024.

Below this, there is a breadcrumb navigation: Home > Codified Laws. A search bar is located at the top right. The main content area is a table with the following data:

Title	Catchline
1	STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT
2	LEGISLATURE AND STATUTES
3	PUBLIC OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES
4	PUBLIC FISCAL ADMINISTRATION
5	PUBLIC PROPERTY, PURCHASES AND CONTRACTS
6	LOCAL GOVERNMENT GENERALLY
7	COUNTIES
8	TOWNSHIPS
9	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT
10	TAXATION

Current Proposed Bills:

In order to see what bills have been proposed by legislators during session, follow the below steps:

- At the top of the home screen, scroll over “Session” and click “2026 Bills.”
- This screen will take you to a complete list of all proposed bills. You can search by topic, scroll through the entire list or click one of the tiles at the top to take you to a specific chamber’s list of bills.
- If you know a specific bill number, you can also search by that from the home screen.

All	
House Bill	Senate Bill
House Commemoration	Senate Commemoration
House Concurrent Resolution	Senate Concurrent Resolution
House Joint Resolution	Senate Joint Resolution
	Senate Resolution

Filter

Bill	Title	DOWNLOAD (CSV)
HB 1001	allow the Government Operations and Audit Committee to issue subpoenas without Executive Board approval.	
HB 1002	update the official code of laws.	

- On the bill page, you will find the full text of the bill, any proposed amendments and when hearings are scheduled or were held.

Date	Action	Audio	Location
01/10/2023	First Reading House H.J. 14	N/A	
01/11/2023	Referred to House State Affairs H.J. 24	N/A	
01/13/2023	Scheduled for hearing	▼	8:12
01/13/2023	House State Affairs Deferred to the 41st legislative day, Passed, YEAS 9, NAYS 3.	▼	8:12
01/18/2023	Recalled from committee (Rule 7-7), Passed H.J. 51	N/A	
01/18/2023	House State Affairs Report out of committee without recommendation, Passed	N/A	
01/20/2023	Placed on calendar pursuant to JR 6F-6, Passed, YEAS 37, NAYS 32. H.J. 70	N/A	
01/23/2023	House of Representatives Do Pass, Passed, YEAS 39, NAYS 31. H.J. 84	▼	39:51
01/24/2023	First read in Senate and referred to Senate State Affairs S.J. 103	N/A	

My LRC+:

My LRC+ is a way for you to get notifications and track specific bills.

- Start by clicking “My LRC+” at the top right-hand corner of the homepage.
- Create an account by entering your information as requested, select ‘Create Account.’

Welcome to MyLRC+

MyLRC is a great way to stay informed on what's happening in the South Dakota Legislature. You can customize the information you receive based on your personal needs.

Sign-In

Username:

Password:

Keep this device signed in

[Forgot User Name or Password?](#)

Create an Account

Email:

Username:

Password:

Confirm Password:

LOGON

CREATE ACCOUNT

- Once logged into your My LRC+ account, you can enter a bill number that you wish to follow and set-up what kind of notifications to receive.
- As session continues, you will receive notifications on bills you select and will be able to visit this page to see how bills you are interested in or that your Legislator is sponsoring, are progressing through the process. You may also search current codified law within My LRC+ by topic or statute number.

My LRC+

Session Bills

Add a new Bill List

Name:

ADD

Notify me my bill hearing schedule each legislative day
 Notify me when a new version of one of my bills is available

My Bill Lists

You currently have no Bill Lists

Page Program Application and Information

Each legislative session, high school students from across South Dakota have an opportunity for a firsthand look at the legislative process by serving as pages for the South Dakota Legislature. Pages are appointed to serve in the House of Representatives or the Senate for four to nine days during one of the five term periods.

The page program is a competitive program, so early application is encouraged. The preferred deadline is in October.

Application is made through a sponsoring legislator or legislator-elect. Talk to a legislator or legislator-elect and ask for the privilege of them sponsoring you.

The Pro Tempore of the Senate selects the pages who will serve in the Senate. The Speaker of the House of Representatives selects the pages who will serve in the House. In early December, you will be notified by the Page Advisor regarding the disposition of your application.

You can find the page general information, term calendar, and application at this link: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Students/Page>



Virtual Viewing Session

South Dakota Public Broadcasting:

- SDPB covers every minute of every legislative session. Each day, sessions are livestreamed on YouTube, public television, and the Legislative Research Council website.
- Option 1: Broadcast daily session on your local SDPB TV station.
- Option 2: Watch Legislative Session on YouTube, streamed live from the SDPB channel.
 - Search “SDPB”
 - Look for the Playlist titled “Statehouse and the current year”
 - Full videos of sessions will be available live each day but will also be available immediately following.
- Option 3: Download SD.Net App on your phone.



Legislative Research Council Webpage:

- Legislative Research Council Webpage offers audio coverage of all committee meetings as well as legislative session.
- To listen, visit sdlegislature.gov and click on the audio link next to the committee you wish to listen to.



Live Viewing Session

- The South Dakota Legislative Session is open to the public. Members of the public can view all aspects from committee meetings to general session and are welcome to visit the Capitol building anytime.
- If you plan to visit the Capitol, there are a few things to keep in mind:
 - You will need to pass through security. Enter at the rear of the Capitol building.
 - Everyone entering the building needs to go through a security screening process where they send any bags through an x-ray machine and you walk through a metal detector. This only takes a couple of minutes.
 - You can visit with your legislators right on the chamber floor.
 - Each member of the South Dakota Legislature has a desk in the chamber. For many, this is their only office space during session. Constituents are welcome on the floor anytime that the doors are open and if your legislators are at their desk, they expect and usually welcome visitors. The chamber doors close two hours prior to the start of general session and will remain closed for one hour following session ending.
 - While the doors are closed, you are not allowed to be in the chamber.



Meeting Your Legislator

Meeting with your elected officials may seem like an intimidating thing, but it does not have to be. They are regular people, just like you, that are elected to take your voice to Pierre so they want to hear what you have to say! Here are some tips for helping those meetings:

Schedule in Advance:

- Our legislators are busy during the 38 days of session. Contacting them and scheduling a time in advance to talk, will allow you to have a more meaningful conversation as opposed to catching them in the hallway while they are on their way to another meeting. It may be a good idea to meet prior to session.
- Be flexible and understanding if they need to reschedule, especially if your meeting time is during a legislative day in Pierre. During the legislative session things move quickly, and a meeting may get scheduled last minute that they must attend.

Come Prepared:

- Have a list of questions ready to ask. You may not get through your full list, but you want to be prepared since this is a meeting you initiated.
- Do some research on your legislators and what bills they have brought to the legislative session.
- Share your Homeschooling story.

Attending Cracker Barrels:

- Cracker Barrels are local discussions with the elected legislators. They may be held by district or by city depending on geographic location. They are an opportunity for legislators to talk about the work they have been doing and also offer a chance for constituents to ask them questions regarding the bills that have been up or are coming.
- There is not a website that lists all scheduled cracker barrels. The best way to find your local one is to read the newspapers, follow your legislators or check FAIRSD's website <https://fairsd.org/coffees-%26-cracker-barrels>, or search the local community calendar.



Prepare to Meet Your Legislator



Research your legislators:

- What committees do they serve on?
- What bills are they prime or co-sponsors on?
- Are they serving in a leadership role (majority leader, Speaker of the House, etc.)?
- This guide along with the LRC website will allow you to be familiar with the common terminologies used in the governmental process.

Dress to Impress:

Be clean and well groomed. Semi-professional to professional attire is appropriate. (Long sleeve button shirt, sport coat, blazer, slacks, modest heights on skirts and dresses, etc.) Make sure your shoes are comfortable, clean, and appropriate for your attire.



Act the Part:

Not only is it important to dress the part when meeting with an elected official, it's also important to act the part! You are representing yourself and the homeschool community. First impressions are lasting impressions. It's crucial to create a great first impression and carry that through your entire interaction. Below are some things to consider:



Be kind, considerate, and respectful. This is not the time to discuss differences but show them your passions and interests.

Cell phones should be silent at all times.

Keep the chatter, laughing, and disruptions with those around you to a minimum. Legislators are forming opinions of homeschoolers with every interaction. Scripture tells us that even a child is known by his doings. Present yourself in a mature and professional manner in your appearance and actions.

When Greeting an Elected Official:

Start with a firm handshake, maintain direct eye contact, and address them as Senator or Representative.



Homeschool Day at the Capitol

Each year FAIRSD sponsors this amazing event as a way for families to come together, meet new faces, and see how our SD system of government works in real time! As homeschoolers, we want to have great relationships with our legislators.

Typical schedule:

- Tour the Capitol, visit with legislators, or watch committee hearings.
- Group photo.
- Lunch served in the Rotunda. Children are given the opportunity to be an Ambassador, have an Academic Display, or play as a Musician.
- When session begins, we will be introduced in both the Senate and the House of Representatives.



Homeschool Day at the Capitol

Watch for details to apply!

Ambassador (greet and serve legislators)



Academic Display (showcase a current project)

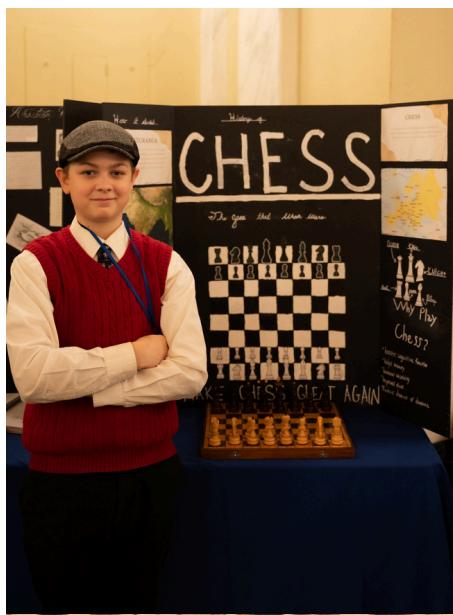


Musician

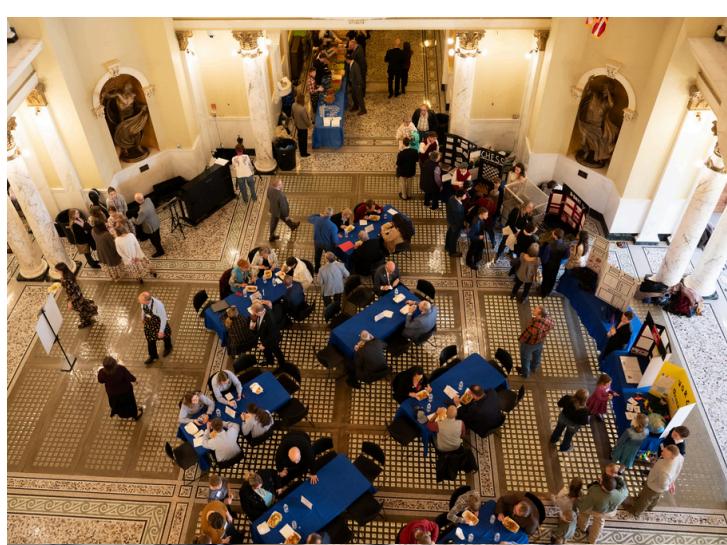
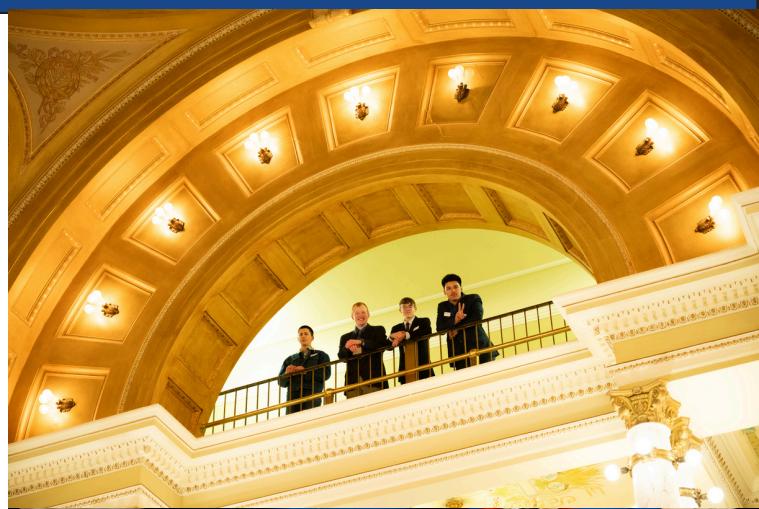


Pierre offers many other opportunities for families to take in. Please follow FAIRSD or go to <https://fairsd.net/day-at-the-capitol> to stay up to date on this wonderful event!

Homeschool Day at the Capitol



Homeschool Day at the Capitol



Interactive Activities

Use these links to continue your civics lesson!

LRC Student Resources: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Students/Resources>

Take a virtual tour of the Capitol, look for Capitol activities, & a scavenger hunt!
<https://boa.sd.gov/capitol/virtual-tour.aspx>

Hillsdale 1776 Curriculum -This FREE curriculum includes American history since the Civil War and American government and civics for both middle and high school students. <https://k12.hillsdale.edu/Curriculum/The-Hillsdale-1776-Curriculum/>

PragerU - U.S. civics and history lessons in a fun quiz show that will have your kids laughing while they learn: <https://www.prageru.com/series/street-smarts>

Authors

For some time I've had a dream of crafting a civics guide tailored for homeschooling families. Today, that dream is a reality thanks to Elli Zell, a homeschool graduate and graphic designer, who used her artistry to bring my vision to life.

My dive into politics began with a mission to legalize midwives in South Dakota, evolving into a decade long personal journey and a 25 year collective battle. I entered as a novice but gradually learned the complexities of the legislative process. How I wish I had a similar guide during those times. This guide is a tribute to that yearning, born from the trials and triumphs of my journey. My children often accompanied me to the Capitol during those years. My son, Drew not only embraced the process as a young lobbyist, a page and an intern, but also went on to become the youngest legislator in South Dakota history! Interestingly, in Drew's inaugural year as a legislator, he cast a pivotal yes vote on the midwife bill. This was the year it finally passed and became law.

Beyond being just a book, this guide is a call to action. Its serves as a gentle push for homeschooling families to explore the civic landscape, recognizing that our involvement is crucial for preserving our freedoms. May it ignite a flame of curiosity, inspiring generations to actively participate in shaping the laws that govern our lives. Remember, Under God the People Rule.

All my best,
Nancy Dennert
Homeschooling Mom of 5
FAIRSD Committee Member



Nancy Dennert with her grandson, Tracy (son of Rep. Drew Dennert and Ashton Dennert)



Elli Zell Graphic Designer



Follow FAIRSD for important
SD Homeschool updates and
news!



Help us continue our work!
Please volunteer or donate to keep
homeschooling accessible to
the next generation!