



An Effective Advocacy Checklist

The November election is upon us and it could have a big impact on the direction of public education in our state. There are a number of things that your board should be doing now and in the months leading up to January and the State Education Convention to strengthen your legislative advocacy efforts. Here's a brief checklist to help you organize your activities to maximize your effectiveness.

Let's look at two key components to becoming an effective legislative advocate for your district. The first, and most important, key component is to develop relationships with your legislators. You will be most effective if you do this *before* you need or want something from your legislator. You may ask: How do I begin to develop these relationships? There is no one single way to do this, but here are a few suggestions we hope will help you:

- **Do some research on your legislator's background.** Is there something there that connects you? Are you in the same business or industry or do you have a professional connection? Did you attend the same school? Are you members of the same church? Do you have friends or relatives in common? You may find you have more in common (to talk about) than you realize.
- **Invite legislators to school board meetings and school events, and give them tours of your schools.** Show them the positive things that are happening in your schools. Illustrate the challenges you face. The more time they spend with you and your students, the more likely they are to

support your cause. Legislators are not going to seek you out. While one could argue that they probably should seek you out, the reality is that they likely won't. You have to make the first move.

- **Organize a regular breakfast or evening meeting with your area legislators.** Getting together with your local lawmakers on a recurring basis is an excellent way to develop relationships. You can do this on your own or by pairing up with neighboring districts. There are several areas around the state where board members and district administrators have teamed up to hold regular meetings with their area legislators. One example is Sheboygan County's education breakfast, which is held one Monday morning per month and is well attended by area legislators. While there isn't always agreement on every issue, attendees develop a rapport (lawmakers get to know you personally and not just as faceless public school leaders). It's a great way to develop a two-way communications flow, as legislators are often happy to give you updates on what is happening in Madison, and will often use the gathering as a sounding board to get feedback on potential legislation. In turn, you get to communicate your positions directly and the lawmakers understand they will have to answer to you on how they vote. Typically, to make such regular meetings work it takes someone to take the lead in setting up these meetings, and the WASB can help you to get these meetings set up and keep them running.

The second key component of effective advocacy is being informed. Knowledge of the legislative process is important. Effective advocates focus their energy on the people making the important decisions when they are being made. The WASB can help you here as well by providing timely information in our weekly legislative updates and in the additional legislative alerts we send out as warranted once the legislative session starts again in January.

School board members can serve important roles both in ensuring passage of bills that are favorable to public schools and in defeating bills that work to the detriment of the public school system. You can strengthen the WASB's advocacy by sharing with us what you are telling your legislators and what you are hearing back from them. The WASB's lobbying efforts will be much more effective in our contacts with lawmakers if we are reiterating what they have already heard from you, their constituents.

Finally, your effective advocacy checklist should include marking down some important dates:

Nov. 8, 2014 — Plan to attend the WASB Legislative Advocacy Conference in Stevens Point to get an insider's understanding of the key legislative issues facing school board members today.

Jan. 23, 2015 — Come to the WASB's Friday morning Legislative Update session at the State Education Convention in Milwaukee.

March 18, 2015 — Plan to participate in WASB's Day at the Capitol in Madison. Communicate directly with your legislators and their staff about the proposed state budget. ■

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