



Advocacy Toolkit

Effective Advocacy for School Board Members

2027-2028



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Why Advocate?

The state and federal government has a significant impact on your local schools. It is important to ensure that policymakers appreciate the effect their decisions have on the local level.

School board members are ideally positioned to foster an understanding of their district's needs and build support for public schools. Your position as a locally elected official gives you a level of instant credibility with your lawmakers and their staff. Through regular and effective communication, you can bolster that credibility and build trust so that your lawmaker will look to you when they need advice or information on issues affecting schools. You know best what is happening in your district and how a given legislative action is likely to affect it. Make sure your lawmakers hear about it too!



The WASB Can Help

The WASB Government Relations (GR) staff provides Wisconsin school boards with high-quality professional representation in Madison and Washington, D.C. The GR staff works to develop effective relationships with lawmakers and agency officials from all perspectives to advance the cause of public education. Our messaging has more impact and effectiveness when we are backed up by your own local arguments and examples. To help you, GR staff also aim to keep you up to date on the latest political news to better inform your own advocacy. How do we do that?

Legislative Update Blog

- Subscribe to our blog to get direct emails whenever there is critical news in Madison and Washington.

Advocacy Alerts

- When something urgent is occurring, we will notify you with a WASB Action Alert. These emails utilize software that allows you to contact your lawmakers with customizable sample messages.

Webinars

- Legal and Legislative Video Updates are held on the third Wednesday of every month.
- Capitol Chat webinars are held every Friday at noon from the state budget introduction to final passage.

Advocacy Focused Events

- **Legislative Conference:** Held during the fall of odd-numbered years, this event is a whole day focused on legislative matters, recent research, data trend and advocacy tips. It also offers a chance to hear directly from key lawmakers on K-12 issues.
- **Day at the Capitol:** Held in the spring of odd-numbered years, this event provides members with a chance to take collective action via meetings held in conjunction with neighboring school districts in their legislator's capitol office.

Website Resources

- Bill Tracking Chart, Federal Updates, State Budget Updates, Advocacy Resources. To find these pages: WASB.org > Services and Resources > Advocacy and Government Relations > webpage of choice.

An aerial night photograph of the Illinois State Capitol building in Springfield. The building's large, illuminated dome is the central focus, topped with a statue. The surrounding city lights and other buildings are visible in the background. A large, solid red diamond is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the text.

State Government

The Ins and Outs
and When to Get
Involved



The Legislative Process

How does a bill become law? It is more complex than the legislature passes a bill and the governor signs it. To be the most effective advocate possible, it's important to have a basic understanding of the legislative process and when you have the best advocacy opportunities to impact a bill's chances. This has gotten more difficult as lawmakers increasingly move legislation quickly with only minimum notice given, especially toward the end of session.

Drafting

Before bills can be introduced, legislators must draft the legislation. Oftentimes, they work with advocates, legislature attorneys, outside organizations, state agencies and constituents in the drafting of legislation. Once the legislation is drafted, it is sent around to fellow lawmakers for cosponsorship, giving other legislators a chance to support the bill upon introduction.

Introduction

As bills are formally introduced, they are assigned a bill number and then referred to a committee. Preceding the number is either "AB" for an Assembly bill or "SB" for a Senate bill. K-12 issues are often referred to the education committees in either chamber, but other committees receive education related bills from time to time.

Committee Action

Most of the work done on a bill – whether that is amendments or working to secure support/opposition – happens in committee. The chairperson of a committee decides whether to hold a public hearing on a bill and/or call an executive session to allow the committee to vote on a proposal. A chairperson can also hold up bills by not acting on them. Leadership can get around committee hang-ups, but committee action/inaction sends a strong message.

Floor Action

After going through committee, bills are placed on the Assembly or Senate calendar for debate by the full chamber. Legislators that support and oppose a bill are given a chance to speak about the bill during the debate. Even if a bill moves through committee, leadership is not guaranteed to place it on the calendar. When debate concludes, a vote is taken to either approve or defeat a bill. Both chambers must approve the same version of a bill for it to move to the governor. If an amendment is adopted in one chamber, the other must also approve the amendment.

Governor Action

Upon passage by both chambers, a bill is sent to the governor. The governor may sign the bill into law, veto the bill or execute an item veto (only for appropriation bills). If the governor vetoes a bill, the legislature can override that decision with a two-thirds vote in both the Assembly and Senate. An item veto or "partial veto" allows a governor to strike out individual lines or letters on appropriation bills but only in certain circumstances. The Legislature can also override a partial veto by a two-thirds vote.

For more info, go to: legis.wisconsin.gov/assembly/acc/media/exukqwr/s/habbl2023.pdf

Advocacy Opportunities: WASB Can Help

Bill Drafting



Legislators often work with local advocates (constituents), such as school board members, to craft the language of legislation. This happens most often when legislators have an existing relationship with a constituent. When relationships are strong, advocates can even go to a legislator and request that a bill be drafted on a particular fund or policy area. If you are working with a legislator or looking for a legislator to work with, notify the WASB GR staff. We can offer our perspective and knowledge to help with the drafting of the bill. If the bill aligns with our resolutions, we can offer support to the bill and help work to get it passed.

Bill Introduction



When K-12 education legislation is introduced, the WASB GR staff will analyze the bill and cross reference it with our resolutions that have been adopted by previous WASB Delegate Assemblies to determine a position. Sometimes we will not take a position on a bill but will monitor it. We will then notify our membership of the bill and what it does and may ask you to contact your legislators in support of or opposition to a bill. We also catalogue all the K-12 bills introduced each session and the WASB position (if any) on our state bill tracking chart.

Committee Action



The WASB will notify you when public hearings are scheduled on K-12 bills. We may ask for members to come and testify or provide written testimony to the committee in support or in opposition to a bill. Committee chairs have significant influence over bills in their committee and can move them forward with momentum or hold them back. Most bills introduced in each legislative session die in committee.

Floor Action



The WASB will notify you of K-12 bills getting floor votes and the opportunity to contact your legislators to tell them how you want them to vote, and how the debated bill would impact your school district. Your legislator may have your communication included in materials they have with them on the floor and may even use your points in their floor speech to bolster their argument.

Governor Action



The final opportunity after a bill has passed both houses of the legislature is to reach out to the governor to sign or veto a bill. When the governor signs a bill that we support, there may be the opportunity to attend a signing ceremony if one is held. This helps build goodwill and generates positive publicity for elected officials.

Testifying at a Public Hearing

Throughout the legislative session, standing committees hold hearings on bills. Testimony to the committee can often affect the outcome of a proposal, particularly when it is based on your experiences in your local school district. As a school official, your comments can be much more persuasive than those of a lobbyist. See below for useful tips and information on how to go about testifying at a hearing.



Before the Hearing:

- Write out your testimony in advance, keep it persuasive yet brief. During busy hearings the chairperson may impose time limits (typically under 5 minutes).
- Notify the WASB if you plan to attend and testify at a public hearing. The GR staff will likely be in attendance and can help you with the logistics of the hearing on-site.
- If you've never been to a hearing before, it can be helpful to watch portions of committee hearings on Wisconsin Eye (wiseye.org) to get a feel for how a public hearing operates.

What to Bring:

- Bring enough copies to distribute to committee members and the committee clerk. Check the legislature's website to see how many committee members you should provide copies to. Roughly 15 copies for Assembly hearings and 8 copies for Senate hearings is a good rule.
- Bring something to take notes.

At the Hearing:

- Register to testify outside the hearing room. To do this, you must either fill out a paper registration slip (Assembly) or use an electronic registration system (Senate). Make sure you know the bill number or topic and check the "Appearing in Favor" or "Appearing Against" box indicating you are there to speak. Indicate to staff or on the slip if you have time constraints as committee chairs are sometimes able to accommodate you. Submit to the Capitol staff at the hearing (or if you use the electronic system, just take a seat!).
- When you are called to testify, thank the committee chair and members for the opportunity to testify and identify yourself and your school district. If your legislator is on the committee, make a note of that. Keep your comments brief and to the point. Be prepared to lead with your local situation and examples of how the proposed bill will impact your district. Try not to repeat the arguments made by prior presenters.
- Following your testimony, committee members may wish to ask you questions regarding your comments, experience or your district. Stick to your points and back up your comments with specific examples from your district. If you don't know the answer, acknowledge the question and offer to follow up with an answer.

After the Hearing:

- Follow up on any questions you were asked during your testimony or requests for additional information, if any. Send copies of your testimony to your local legislators. Celebrate a job well done!

The State Budget Process

The process for crafting Wisconsin's budget operates a bit differently than the normal legislative process. More steps are involved and the process is more arduous than passing a policy bill. Wisconsin, unlike other states, works on a two-year (biennial) budget cycle, which begins on July 1 of odd-numbered years. The next budget cycle, the 2027-29 biennium, will begin on July 1, 2027, and ends on June 30, 2029. The preparation for the biennial budget, however, begins more than a year earlier.

2026

June–July: State agencies begin planning their budget requests.

September: State agencies submit their requests to the governor.

2027

January–February: The governor delivers the biennial budget message and proposes a two-year budget.

March–April: The Joint Finance Committee (JFC) holds public hearings on the governor's budget proposal, typically at 4-6 locations around the state (see sidebar).

April–May: The JFC modifies, deletes and adds provisions to the governor's proposed budget, and sends another version to the Legislature.

May–June: The Assembly and Senate majority and minority parties develop their own amendments.

Early to Mid-June: After the individual caucuses have finished deliberations, the majority party's budget package is introduced and scheduled for floor debate where the minority party will offer amendments. The budget bill is adopted by a majority vote of one house and then proceeds to the other house where it is amended and adopted in a similar fashion.

Late June: If the Assembly and Senate approve separate versions of the budget, the differences are reconciled in a conference committee before a final budget is approved in both houses.

June–July: The governor reviews the budget bill. The Wisconsin Constitution provides the governor with extensive authority to partially veto appropriation bills. Once the governor signs the budget bill into law, minus any partial vetoes, it then becomes the state's fiscal budget document for the biennium. The Legislature has the authority to override any of the governor's partial vetoes with a 2/3 vote in each house.

TESTIFYING AT A BUDGET HEARING

Members of the general public may testify before the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) at the budget hearings. These hearings are a great chance for your board to provide testimony highlighting the most important issues for your district. The WASB encourages school board member participation at these hearings. Budget hearings are run similarly to other public hearings but there are some differences to point out.

Be prepared to wait (perhaps for several hours) before you are called to testify. Typically, these hearings attract hundreds of people who wish to speak. People are called to testify in the order they register. In general, the earlier you are able to get to the hearing site and register, the earlier you will be able to speak.

Maximize your presence. A strict time limit is imposed on those testifying (~2 min.). Those testifying as part of a group are given more time (~5 min.). To make efficient use of limited time, consider grouping together with other board members/administrators who can attend. Make sure everyone knows their individual role ahead of time. Avoid pleasantries; get to the point. You can provide a written copy of your testimony to the committee to explain your points in greater detail.

If a hearing is held in your area, there is a good chance your local legislators will be there, even if your legislator is not on the JFC. They may even fill in for JFC members.

WASB GR staff will be present at each hearing. We can help you register to testify, answer onsite logistics, provide talking points and provide materials to prepare your testimony. Be sure to check in with us at the hearing so you are awarded your membership points!

How to Find Your Legislators

Wisconsin Legislators



You can find your legislators and their contact information by entering your address here: maps.legis.wisconsin.gov.

Alternatively, you can find your legislators and their contact information by calling the toll-free Legislative Hotline at 800-362-9472.

Want to mail them a letter?

Senator
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Assembly (Reps A-L)
P.O. Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Assembly (Reps M-Z)
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Federal Legislators



United States Senate – [Senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov)

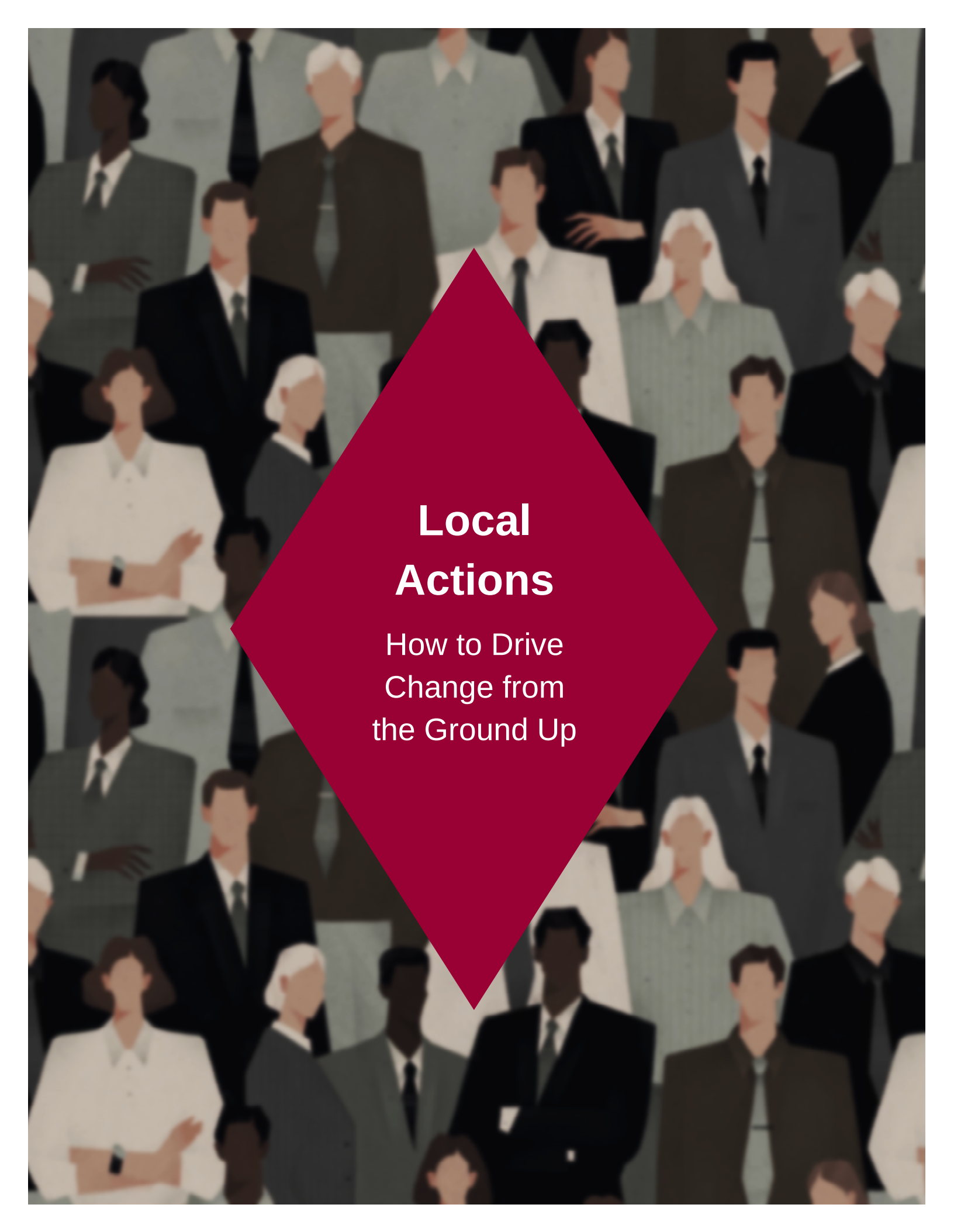
Address information and web contact forms be found here:
[senate.gov/states/WI/intro.htm](https://www.senate.gov/states/WI/intro.htm)

Phone numbers can be found here:
[senate.gov/general/resources/pdf/senators_phone_list.pdf](https://www.senate.gov/general/resources/pdf/senators_phone_list.pdf)

House of Representatives – [House.gov](https://www.house.gov)

Find your representative and their contact information by zip code at:
[house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative](https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative)

General Contact Address:
Name of Representative
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515



Local Actions

How to Drive
Change from
the Ground Up

Advocacy at the Board Meeting

In order to set up your board to be the best advocates possible, it is important to create a legislative advocacy plan to guide and structure your efforts. This will help your board better engage with legislative issues and stay informed. School boards should agree on a legislative advocacy plan – whether by motion, general consensus, written plan or official board policy. Subscribers to WASB's Policy Resource Guide have access to a sample board policy on this matter. A single approach will not work for every board as each district is unique and board governance models vary from district to district. Find the best fit for your board below:

Legislative Liaison



A single individual who tracks legislative issues and engages with advocacy organizations and legislators.

This individual could be the board president, a board member or the district administrator.

In this plan, it is important to determine if the individual is authorized to communicate on behalf of the board/district without first obtaining a vote from the board on an advocacy position.

This plan allows for greater speed and flexibility; however, it requires trust and general board consensus on legislative affairs.

Legislative Committee



A committee of board members and possibly the district administrator to collectively track legislative issues and through dialogue determine positions and strategies.

When using this method, determine whether the committee's decisions can be undertaken without action from the full board.

The advantage to this plan is having multiple people vetting issues and positions on those issues.

The disadvantage is that meetings of committees still require the same open meetings law notice requirements as a regular board meeting which is not conducive to speed and flexibility.

Tips for Any Board Regardless of Your Legislative Strategy

Have at least one person from your board subscribe to the WASB Legislative Update Blog. We will help filter through the noise and post critical updates that your board should be aware of. Have this person report updates that may be relevant for your district to the full board routinely.

Discuss at least one legislative issue during each school board meeting. The legislative liaison or committee can update the board on important developments. Regular engagement with legislative issues will allow you to be better informed and develop stronger relationships with your legislators.

Board Resolutions

Looking to put your advocacy plan into action? Perhaps your board is just starting to engage in advocacy and is looking to take a first step on your primary issue. One way to start is by considering and adopting a board resolution. Board resolutions are official positions voted on by your board at a meeting. Resolutions allow you to put your thoughts into action and communicate your board's goals to a wide audience. We encourage you to pass resolutions on legislative issues and share those resolutions with your legislators, local media and the WASB.

While board resolutions are important and official acts of your locally elected school board, on their own they are not strong legislative advocacy efforts. Think of board resolutions as a vehicle to help promote greater awareness on the part of board members, the public and legislators of an issue or concern. Consider them the beginning of the conversation, not the end.

As a board member, you have most likely seen the typical resolution format...

WHEREAS...the Dairyland School District educates 1,234 students; and

WHEREAS...the Dairyland community has relied on our school district to provide a sound basic education for 100 years.

THEREFORE...the Dairyland School District will work with the WASB in developing an advocacy strategy that best serves our students, staff and community members.

In the legislature, resolutions in the typical format are largely symbolic efforts (think recognizing a long-time employee's retirement or proclaiming an official state cheese) and are not necessarily taken as seriously as they should be by legislative offices when they receive them. For legislative staff who are accustomed to responding to emails/letters that are clearly from individual constituents, it can also be confusing for them to know exactly to whom they should respond.

How to Take Your Resolution to the Next Level

- Format your resolution as a letter or include a cover letter with a specified person (board president, board legislative liaison, etc.) for your legislator to respond to. **There is no legal requirement to format your resolution in the traditional "whereas..., therefore..."**.
- Assign a board member to follow up with legislative offices after you send them your resolution. Ask if they received it and summarize your board discussion from the meeting on why the issue is important to your school district.

Work With WASB

Be sure to share your resolutions with WASB. We collect your resolutions and post them on our website for other boards across Wisconsin to view and help inform their own advocacy efforts. In this way, you can share your ideas with other boards who can join you in collective advocacy. Many voices are stronger than one.

WASB may at times craft draft resolutions around particularly critical issues. We encourage you to take these, boost them with local stories and data, and adopt them at your board meetings. We can also help you craft resolutions if you are struggling with getting one started!

Community Engagement

When people hear the word “advocacy,” they often think only of communicating with or trying to persuade state legislators, federal lawmakers, state and federal agencies, etc. Those are very important parts of the advocacy picture; however, the story goes beyond communicating with state and federal officials.

Perhaps your greatest opportunity to advocate for public education as a school board and as an individual board member is at the local level, where you have the opportunity to listen, collaborate and influence positive and productive changes to strengthen public education.



Local community advocacy is not only an important part of engaging your constituents, but it can additionally create new avenues for advocating at the state and federal level. When community partners and school districts can approach lawmakers together, it better demonstrates the local support for your district and for your requests. Board members and administrators, while important advocates for school districts, can be viewed as the “usual suspects” by lawmakers. When district and community partners can coalesce in their advocacy goals, legislators are even more likely to feel the weight of the issue.

Identify the Community

- Identify community organizations, groups and individuals that are crucial stakeholders in your district.
- Recognize community groups or organizations that attend your board meetings.
- Use social media to engage with grassroots advocates.

Build Relationships

- Express your appreciation to stakeholders for their support on specific issues.
- Invite your community to key school functions, such as graduation, sports events and academic events.
- Invite specific groups/organizations to board meetings and consider letting various groups make a short report to the board on their activities.

Build Coalitions

- Find various ways to inform your community about what is happening in your district.
- Cultivate a group of local concerned citizens to act as “key communicators” or “ambassadors.”
- Meet with local service organizations (Kiwanis, Rotary, Farm Bureau, etc.) to discuss education issues.
- Meet with other local government entities (park district, library board, city council, etc.) to discuss common concerns and legislative issues affecting your district.
- Use local media at all levels (newspaper, radio, television, websites).

Legislative and Candidate Forums



One of the best ways for school districts to get involved with legislative issues and helping the public understand how legislators/candidates are thinking about education on the state level is by hosting a legislative or candidate forum. School districts can host these events by themselves and narrowly tailor it to community specific issues and with only legislators/candidates in their area or they can partner with neighboring school districts to help increase attention, expand the issues discussed, share staff/resources and demonstrate collective advocacy.

Legislative Forums

Legislative forums are events featuring current legislators designed to get their opinions and positions on current and forthcoming legislation and challenges impacting education. The key to getting quality insights from legislators and getting them to better respond to your concerns is consistency. In some areas of the state, legislative forums are held on a monthly or annual basis. Some are held in the morning before workdays and dubbed “Legislative Breakfasts.” These are extremely effective in creating and maintaining relationships and an ongoing dialogue with your area’s lawmakers. There is also an accountability factor as legislators know they have to face the music at the next meeting for their actions.

Candidate Forums

In even-numbered years, after the legislative session is over in March/April, campaign and election season begins. Half of the state Senate seats and all state Assembly seats are up for reelection in the fall of even-numbered years. A great way for your school district to play an active role in the election is to host a candidate forum. A forum can help to engage your community around an upcoming election, to build support for the issues that matter to your school district, and to learn more about the candidates running to represent you. The last thing you want as a school leader is to be surprised by how a newly elected legislator votes/feels about education issues. By hosting a forum, you can be better prepared for new representation in Madison while also building a relationship with a candidate before they take office.

How to Host a Successful Legislative/Candidate Forum

Plan Ahead



Pick a time and date to host your forum. Avoid holidays, business hours and dates when other community functions are scheduled. For legislative forums, Mondays often work well because state legislators are usually in Madison from Tuesday through Thursday during the regular session.

Hosting at the school is ideal as then candidates/legislators will have an opportunity to tour the school but make sure you have adequate seating for all expected attendees.

Invite Legislators/Candidates



Legislative boundaries typically determine which legislators/candidates to invite and which neighboring school districts to partner with. Send an initial invitation letter/email/call well before the planned event and be sure to follow up a couple of times as the event approaches. For legislative forums use the lawmaker’s official Capitol office contact information for invitations. For candidate forums, candidate contact information is available at elections.wi.gov/. For candidate forums, send invites to incumbents’ campaign address rather than their Capitol office. It’s best to schedule your candidate forum early. Schedules typically fill up the closer you get to the date of the primary or general election.

Choose a Format



There are many ways to structure a candidate forum. Choose which format will work best for your school district considering partnering groups, staff, moderator and your comfort level. In any format you'll need a moderator to introduce the legislators/candidates, start the dialogue, keep the discussion moving and screen questions submitted. Ask a well-known, nonpartisan member of your community to serve in this role—a school administrator, school board president, a local media person or a WASB GR staffer are common examples. Some formats to consider include:

- Legislators/candidates give prepared remarks, and attendees ask follow-up questions from microphones in the audience.
- Legislators/candidates are asked prepared questions on legislation or themes important to public education and your community.
- Legislators/candidates are asked questions that the audience submits on index cards. At the end, candidates provide closing statements, with an equal amount of time given to each candidate.

Generate Interest



As mentioned previously, consider partnering with neighboring school districts or even your local municipal officials. Working together with other districts allows you to reach more people and gain more exposure. Working with local municipal governments broadens the content areas that will be discussed and brings in additional interest, people and exposure. Inform local media, as well as parent, teacher or other civic groups about the event. Spread the word utilizing newsletters, social media, local newspapers, local television, radio outlets. WASB can also help promote your event.

If your district desires to have media film and stream the event, send a media advisory about the event three to five days in advance. Consider allocating central, unobstructed space close to electrical outlets for TV camera crews and TV and radio reporters to cover your event. Not all events need to be televised or covered by the media. Not allowing media may generate more candid dialogue, but it might risk less exposure.

Keep it Fair and Nonpartisan



As a trusted, nonpartisan voice in the community, your school board and school district are uniquely suited to host a legislative/candidate forum. Working with your moderator, try to ensure each legislator/candidate has equal opportunity to react to each question.

For legislative forums, invite ALL legislators in your area regardless of party. Inform invited legislators about what is going to be discussed in advance, so they are prepared and can give substantive responses. The idea is not to “stump” legislators, but to let them express their views and allow the public to make a judgment about them. For candidate forums, make sure ALL major-party candidates in that election are invited. Make a thorough and good faith effort to ensure the participation of at least two candidates for a specific office but you may proceed with a forum if only one candidate accepts. Again, provide the questions in advance to give candidates a chance to educate themselves and prepare a substantive response.

If only one candidate/legislator attends, make clear to attendees and in your advertising that all candidates/legislators were invited to participate, naming names and giving reasons (if any) for nonparticipation, quoting invitees. This avoids the impression that you are taking a stance by omission.

Take Notes and Follow Up



During the forum, make note of the legislator's/candidates' positions and any commitments they provide. This will be useful in future communications and allow you to better hold them accountable for their votes. Send thank-you letters to the participating legislators/candidates, any school district staff who assisted in making the arrangements, the moderator, timer and any other volunteers.

The background features a stylized illustration of a person's profile on the right side, rendered in a flat, modern style. The person has light skin and is looking towards the left. Behind the person and across the top are several overlapping speech bubbles in bright colors: yellow, light blue, and light green. The entire scene is set against a solid grey background. A large, dark red diamond shape is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the text.

Effective Communication

Communicate Effectively

The goal of regular, effective communication is to build both a relationship and credibility with your legislators so that they will look to you when they need advice or information on education issues.

Keep in Mind

- Your status as a locally elected school board member is an asset and gives you added credibility—don't shy away from using that advantage. Always mention your position on the school board when contacting your lawmakers. You are an elected official speaking to another elected official and you share constituents. That said, you must avoid speaking on behalf of the entire school board unless you are authorized to do so. "I am contacting you as an individual school board member and not on behalf of the entire board" is a good clarification/disclaimer.
- Written correspondence to elected officials is a public record that is subject to release under the state's public records law should someone make a request. While the chances of public disclosure are small, it is still advisable not to write anything you would not want to become public.

Be Sure To

- Be polite and respectful.
- Thank them for their positions and service.
- Be persistent. Don't let an unreturned message discourage you. They are busy, it's not personal.
- Make your message timely. Send your message when the legislation is being considered.
- Familiarize yourself with the issue(s) ahead of time.
- Include local examples and specific information about the impact to your district and students if possible.
- Be prepared to explain your issue to someone who may know little about how schools operate.
- Use the Assembly/Senate bill number if you have it.
- Follow up after the vote. Thank your legislator if you agree with how they voted. If they didn't vote the way you asked, let them know politely and ask if you can follow up with them.

Avoid

- Being rude and disrespectful. This will undermine your message and negatively impact your credibility.
- Providing false information. If you mistakenly give bad information, follow up as soon as possible to correct your mistake. If you don't know an answer, say that. Don't make something up.
- Making issues partisan. The focus should always center on your students.
- Contacting lawmakers immediately after something happens that makes you emotional or angry. Give it 24 hours to think about it and compose your message thoughtfully.
- Do not assume you know their position. If the governor or another legislator of the same party makes a statement or comes out with legislation, do not assume your legislator necessarily agrees with them. Ask for their position after giving them your thoughts.

Methods of Communication

There are many ways to reach out to your legislators: meetings (in-person or virtual), phone, email, social media, board resolutions. All methods of communicating can be effective. **The important thing is to do it REGULARLY.** Your method of contact is less important than being in regular contact—use the method that is most comfortable for you. Below are some various methods of contact (and corresponding tips) you can use to keep in contact with your legislators and help build relationships further.

School Invitations

- Invite legislators to your school board meetings to give your full board a legislative update and/or the ability to ask them questions about issues or express views about legislation.
- Invite legislators to tour your schools. While you want to show off all the great things you are doing, also make sure to take the opportunity to inform them of your challenges and needs. The more time they spend with you and your students, the more likely they are to support your cause (or at least understand it better). Take photos of the visit for your website, social media and local media.

Legislative Listening Sessions

From time to time, legislators will announce that they are holding “office hours” or a town hall-style meeting with their constituents. These meetings are typically held in a public place, such as a town or village hall or public library building, and give constituents an opportunity to meet with their lawmaker in a one-on-one or small group setting to talk about issues and concerns. Look for times in legislators’ e-newsletters (go to their webpage to subscribe), their social media pages or the newspaper.

Meetings

The advantage of this method is having dedicated personal time with your legislator. This will help them put a specific issue together with your name and face and allow you to determine certain things via body language and tone that you would not be able to in written communication. To set up a meeting, email or call your legislator’s Capitol office and request a time to meet. When contacting the office, be sure to briefly introduce yourself and explain why you want to meet. Be sure to mention that you are a constituent and a school board member. Be sure to follow up and confirm the appointment a couple of days ahead of time to be sure nothing arose in their schedule.

Reminder: If a quorum or majority of your board attends this meeting, you may have to provide notice under the public (open) meetings law. You can avoid the notice requirement if fewer than a majority or quorum of your board attends.

District Meetings: Sometimes you can meet your legislator in the district. Some state senators have district offices for this purpose; most others will be willing to meet somewhere like a local coffee shop or diner. In-district meetings are recommended because they are most likely to be with the legislators themselves and you do not need to travel to Madison. Mondays and Fridays are generally good days to set up meetings in the district when the legislature is in session.

Madison Meetings: When the legislature is in session, legislators are typically in the Capitol Tuesday through Thursday for committee meetings and floor sessions. Planning a future trip to Madison? Consider setting aside some time to meet with your legislator. Email in to their official email and request a time to meet. Perhaps you found out you will be in Madison for work in a couple days. Call in and see if your legislator will be in the office, or just stop by the Capitol to say hello to their staff and drop off some business cards.

Tips for a Successful Meeting:

- You will likely only have 15 to 30 minutes with your legislator, so maximize your time and prioritize your asks to the most important issues for your district. Remember you will need time for questions.
- Be sure to state/write down the bill number if you are referring to specific legislation.
- Practice beforehand what you want to say or, if it is a group, decide who will say what.
- Be clear and tell your legislator exactly what you would like him or her to do on an issue or piece of legislation. You don't want to leave them guessing.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and follow up later.
- Leave the door open for another meeting. Let your legislator know you are interested in working together on education issues in the future.
- If possible, leave behind a one-page fact sheet with the most important information about your issue. Include your contact information.
- Take photos with your lawmakers. You can use these on your website, social media or local media. Be sure to send them a copy as well.
- Follow up with a thank-you note or letter reminding your legislator (or staff) what you talked about and the actions you asked them to take. Include the answers to any questions that you were unable to answer during your visit. Send them a picture from the meeting.

Virtual Meetings: Some legislators may ask to meet virtually, such as over Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, etc. This is certainly an option and allows for greater flexibility in scheduling. However, it is not the preferred option as this doesn't allow you to connect in person and read their body language as easily. If you do connect virtually, the tips above still apply. Additionally, be sure to: keep your camera on, mute your microphone when not speaking, limit distractions and noises, and avoid multitasking!

Emails and Letters

- Include your address and telephone number so they can confirm you are a constituent and respond.
- Proofread! Too often, the speed and ease of sending emails allows for poor grammar and spelling. Even if a staffer can determine your meaning, such errors reflect badly on your overall argument.
- If you want to comment on more than one issue, it is best to send a separate message for each one. That can help to ensure that you get a response to each of your concerns and they aren't overlooked.
- Request a reply or a conversation to talk about your position on the bill or issue. Be sure to ask for your legislator's position on the issue as it may not be what you think.

Phone Calls

- When you call a legislator's office, don't expect to be able to speak with them directly. Rather, ask for the staff member who handles education issues. Take note of that staff person's name so you can follow up with them or ask for them when calling in the future.
- Explain why you are calling: create one or two talking points or key messages to hone the content of your message. Be polite and concise.
- Ask for your legislator's position on the issue. Expect that the staff person may not know this and ask to follow up with you.

Social Media

Be sure to follow your legislators on social media when possible. You can see what they are posting or engaging with and use that for conversations and meetings. **If you post photos with them, tag them. If they post something you agree with, like it!** Many legislators engage with constituents on social media, but if yours are not, be sure to use one of the above methods to contact them.



Looking for more information or materials to help your advocacy efforts. Check out our dedicated Advocacy Toolkit webpage. Along with additional information, this page has sample materials such as board resolutions, emails, letters and a legislative advocacy strategy to help you build and model your own work!

Contact the WASB GR Team with questions, comments or concerns at any time! We are here to serve you and help empower your local efforts the best we can. We strive to make sure we are providing you with quality information, strategies and messaging whenever possible.

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