



Advocacy Toolkit

A "HOW-TO" GUIDE TO POWERFUL EDUCATION ADVOCACY



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ADVOCACY TOOLKIT: INTRODUCTION

Foreword

At every school board meeting, you make decisions that impact the lives of children in your community. As district leaders, you have the ultimate responsibility to the students in your schools, their parents and the community you serve – which is why a school board member’s role as an advocate for public education is a fundamental responsibility of every school board member.

As an education leader, you have firsthand understanding of your district’s needs, and how those needs ensure the best education for South Dakota’s public school children. You have an important message to deliver to your state and federal representatives, the media and your local community. And, as those locally elected to see to the education of children in your community, you have the political clout to influence both state and national public policy.

Why is your advocacy so important?

Your advocacy efforts are critical because there is a growing need to deliver our message: The education of South Dakota’s children must be the top priority of our state’s policymakers. While many districts face declining enrollments and shrinking budgets, our leaders in the Legislature must understand how the decisions they make impact children in your district. The need to take an active role in the broader political arena is given added importance by recent movements to usurp local decision making in favor of one-size-fits-all, state-level mandates. More than ever, it is imperative for school board members to lead the way in advocating for public education.

Can you really make an impact?

Absolutely. Legislators have to make hundreds of decisions during their time in Pierre, and they make decisions based on the information available. They listen to their constituents back home, particularly those who have knowledge in the area they are advocating. You are on

the front lines in your community and can explain the real-life impact of state-level policy decisions. That kind of information is invaluable to legislators – and it is persuasive. You are also a leader in your community, sharing an electoral base with your legislators.

In particular, your efforts to communicate with your legislators – either face-to-face or in the form of insightful, personal letters – and the extent to which you express your opinions in local media outlets – in the form of letters to the editor, opinion editorials and articles – make the most difference.

In fact, the impact local district leaders can have in the policy making process is why Associated School Boards of South Dakota strongly encourages local school board members to deliver advocacy messages to the Legislature. ASBSD has established a grassroots lobbying arm, called the Legislative Action Network (LAN), to keep local district leaders informed and ready to advocate.

Using this guide to maximize your impact

Effective grassroots lobbying isn’t difficult – it simply requires effort. There are several time-tested activities that allow you to make your voice heard. From setting up meetings with local legislators to writing letters to the editor, this tool kit will show you some simple tools to focus your political power. Once you have familiarized yourself with this tool kit, the next step is to make a commitment to advocacy.

Remember: advocacy efforts are a fundamental responsibility of school board members. Your efforts can make yet another positive difference in the education of our state’s schoolchildren.

CHAPTER ONE: HOW THE LEGISLATURE WORKS

The Political Process: An Overview

You may often hear legislators and other state officials reference a piece of legislation that is making its way through the “political process.” The “political process” refers to an undetermined amount of time – some concepts are realized over several years, while some ideas gain momentum so quickly it’s hard to keep track.

In South Dakota, the Legislature meets each year. In even years the session lasts 35 days, in odd years, legislators convene for 40 days. With the myriad of legislative rules and procedures, willing advocates will have to pay close attention – action can come quickly, particularly toward the end of session when the most influential education policy decisions are typically made.

By knowing how the “political process” works, you can determine when and how to most effectively influence the decisions made by the Legislature.

How a bill becomes law

Each bill takes a predictable path through the process. Essential, the process goes like this:

Introduction of a bill:

A member of the Legislature introduces a new piece of legislation. A bill can be introduced in either chamber, and is sometimes the same concept is included in different bills and introduced in both the House of Representatives (House) and the Senate. Each bill is given a number – bills introduced in the House start with HB, and are given a number in the thousands; bills introduced in the Senate start with SB, and are given a number that starts in the single digits.

Referral to committee

Once a bill is introduced, the legislative leadership assigns the bill to the appropriate committee for consideration. The committee schedules each piece of legislation for a hearing. During the hearing, both supporters (referred

to as proponents) and opponents of the bill are given time to testify on the bill.

Once the bill has had a hearing, the committee closes testimony and takes action on a bill. Typically, committees act on bills in one of the following ways:

- » **Do Pass** – A recommendation by the committee that their fellow legislators support the legislation during subsequent steps in the process.
- » **Defer to the 36th/41st Day** - Removes the bill from the process by postponing consideration to a fictional day on the Legislative Calendar (remember, the Legislature is only in session for 35 days in even years and 40 days in odd years).
- » **Amend** - After committee testimony, any committee member can move to amend the bill to change the wording - but not the original intent - of the bill.
- » **'Hog House'** - If a legislator wants to significantly alter the intent of the bill, they propose a hog house amendment, which deletes everything in the bill and replaces it with a new concept or new language. Hog Houses can occur at any point during session.
- » **Refer** – If one committee believes that another committee should weigh in on a bill before the floor gets an opportunity to vote, committee members may vote to refer the bill to another committee, essentially transferring authority of the bill to another committee. For example, most bills that require legislative appropriation are referred to the appropriations committee before the floor debates the issue.
- » **Table** – Members of the committee can vote to table the legislation, which means they can bring the bill back up for consideration at a later date.
- » **Consent Calendar** – If a bill receives a unanimous vote by a committee, the committee can move to have the bill placed on the consent calendar, which is similar to the consent agenda you see at your local board meetings.

Floor Action

Once a bill makes it out of committee, the bill is voted upon by the membership of the House or Senate. Vote on the floor include:

- » **Do Pass** – In general, a bill has to receive an affirmative vote from the floor to be move through the process (some bills, such as appropriations, need to receive a two-thirds majority). If a piece of legislation fails to receive a majority vote, it is considered failed, and its journey thorough the legislative process comes to an end.
- » **Table** – A decision to table stalls the bill in the legislative process, and the concept may or may not be revisited.

Special Circumstances

Sometimes legislators invoke legislative procedures from the floor, including:

- » **Move to Reconsider** – No matter whether a vote has passed or failed, a legislator can move to have the bill reconsidered, meaning the bill will come up for vote again at a later date. Moving to reconsider gives legislators time to persuade other legislators to vote for or against the proposed measure.
- » **Smokeout** – If a bill was killed in the committee, an individual legislator can use a legislative procedure, commonly referred to as a smokeout, to give the full body a chance to vote on the measure.

Moving On

A bill has to move through both the House and the Senate before it can be forwarded to the Governor for consideration. For example, if a bill is introduced in the House, makes it through committee and past the House floor, it moves on to the Senate and goes through the process again.

If both the House and the Senate pass a bill out, it moves on to the Governor. At that point, the Governor can sign it, allow it to become law without signing it, or veto the bill.

Conference Committees

Sometimes the House and the Senate disagree on how to handle a particular issue. In that case, a bill moves to conference committee, where representatives from each chamber work to resolve the matter. The conference

committee report then moves on to the floor of each chamber for a vote.

Most of the time, education funding legislation ends up in a conference committee.

CHAPTER TWO: GETTING TO KNOW LEGISLATORS

Getting to know your legislators

Taking the time to assemble information about your legislators is an important step to take before you contact them. Here are some pieces of information to collect about your representatives before you contact them.

Committee Assignments

Take special note of the committees your legislator serves on, and the impact their service may have on achieving your advocacy objectives. For example, if a legislator from your district is on an education committee, they play a key role in nearly all education legislation that is introduced.

- » *TIP: Find out who your legislators are by accessing the MyASBSD section of ASBSD.org*
- » *TIP: Access a biography of legislators by visiting the **Legislative Research Council** at <http://legis.state.sd.us>. Click on "Current Legislators" and then select your legislator.*

However, remember that it is important to keep all members advised on education issues. Ultimately, every member has a vote.

Voting Records

Knowing how your legislators voted on key education issues will give you an idea of where each is likely to stand on the issue at hand. It may also help you shape your arguments.

- » *TIP: Use ASBSD's Bill Tracker to find out how your legislator voted on key education legislation. To access the bill tracker, go to asbsd.org/billtracker.*

Personal Information

Knowing some personal tidbits about your legislators can help you establish ties. Did they attend public school in your district? Do they have a background in education? Do they have children in school? Any information you can gather may help you establish a relationship.

Leadership Assignments

Legislative leadership controls the political agenda for each political party. If your local

legislator is an elected legislative leader, he or she will have more input on legislation.

Location of Local Crackerbarrels

Many legislators establish local crackerbarrels during session. Crackerbarrels are the legislators' attempt to gather community input on legislation during session. Typically, crackerbarrels are set up on Saturday mornings. Make sure to find out where your legislators hold their crackerbarrels, and plan to attend during session. Crackerbarrels are a great opportunity for face-to-face interaction during session.

Committees that Impact Education

There are several issues beyond traditional education bills that impact education. In addition to legislation on education programs and funding, education advocates may pay close attention to taxation laws and local government issues. So, where looking to see if your legislators are on "key" committees, keep in mind the following committees that are important for public schools.

- » House and Senate Education handle a good majority of education-related legislation.
- » House and Senate Appropriations has budgetary authority for all state dollars.
- » House and Senate Local government considers the authority of local government entities.
- » House and Senate Taxation considers taxation issues.
- » House and Senate Retirement Laws reviews the laws relating to the South Dakota retirement system.
- » House and Senate State Affairs are committees made up of legislative leadership. Sometimes important legislation is referred to the committees because leadership want to ensure a certain outcome for the bill.

CHAPTER THREE: MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

How to Make Your Voice Heard in Pierre

Legislative session goes by quickly, and legislators place value on clear, concise and informative communication from education advocates. School leaders are in a good position to know which laws work and don't work in public schools. The following pages detail proven means of effectively communicating with your legislators.

Joining an Organized Network

One of the best ways to increase the influence of your local school board and school district is to join a broader network of education advocates – to get organized! In addition to the power of joining forces with other advocates, most networks provide valuable information about which issues need your attention, when to get involved and how to have an impact.

ASBSD has created one such network, called the Legislative Action Network (LAN), made up of school board members and administrators from every legislative district.

ASBSD's Legislative Action Network

ASBSD LAN members work together with ASBSD to advocate for public education. The one-two punch can be a powerful and influential partnership.

ASBSD keeps LAN member informed through three electronic newsletters – LAN Dispatch, and LAN Alert. Because LAN members may need to act quickly, ASBSD asks that LAN members have regular access to e-mail, and that they check it on a regular basis during session.

- » LAN Dispatch is sent out twice a week during session. Because the education committees typically meet through noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays, ASBSD works quickly to compile information on the latest happenings in Pierre, which are sent out in the form of an electronic newsletter titled LAN Dispatch.

FYI: The role of LAN members

Every school board appoints a board member as its ASBSD Legislative Action Network (LAN) member to attend to legislative issues. In order for school board members to influence legislation with grassroots advocacy, ASBSD needs LAN members to make a commitment to the following responsibilities:

- » Legislative Action Network Members develop, maintain and nurture constructive dialogue with state and federal policy-makers.
- » Legislative Action Network Members facilitate visits by legislators to schools and classrooms in their districts.
- » Legislative Action Network Members keep informed about current education issues.
- » Legislative Action Network Members are willing to call their legislators at home or at the state capitol within a short period of time, generally within an hour or two of receiving the call from ASBSD staff.
- » Legislative Action Network Members are willing and able to provide specific information to legislators from their local district perspective.
- » Legislative Action Network Members are willing to advocate issues from a state-wide perspective when necessary.
- » Legislative Action Network Members provide ASBSD with their contact information (e-mail address[es] and telephone numbers) and be accessible for ASBSD staff to contact them at work or at home when the need arises.
- » Legislative Action Network Members inform other board members and community members of the relationship between state and federal policy and public schools.

- » LAN Alert is sent out if a critical vote is scheduled in Pierre, signaling you to act quickly to contact your legislators. Often times, action on the bill will take place in the next couple of days and your voice is critical.

Writing Your Legislators

Personal, thoughtful letters have an impact on your legislators. As a school leader, the most effective way to write your legislator is as a representative of your entire board; however, individual letters are the next best. To make certain that letters can be written in a brief time frame, have a school board policy in place authorizing a point person on the board to write on behalf of the board or for the board president's signature.

When writing your letters, keep in mind:

1. Focus on one issue or bill per letter, and identify the bill by name and number.
2. Express your point of view and explain why your legislator should be supportive. Be brief and courteous.
3. Briefly explain the local impact of the legislation – just the facts.
4. Request that your legislator take a specific position on the bill.
5. Ask for a response from your legislator.
6. When writing an individual letter, use your signature and personal letterhead, and state that you are a board member. If you are writing a collective letter written by the board, have the president of the board sign it and put it on the board's letterhead.
7. Make sure your return address is on the letter (envelopes often get lost) so that your legislator can respond. Since you may be working in a short time frame, provide your e-mail address or phone number as an avenue for return communication.

Faxing and E-mailing

Letters may be ideal when the Legislature isn't in session, but faxing or e-mailing your legislators make for quicker communication during session.

Faxing

Write your letter as you normally would, using district letterhead. Fax it to your legislators attention using the Legislature's fax number, (605) 773-6806.

E-mail

E-mail is the quickest form of communication, and it allows you to copy several people at the same time. For instance, you can e-mail you legislator, and "CC" ASBSD.

- » **TIP:** When e-mailing your legislator, make sure to include the fact that you are a school board member from your school district in the subject line. Legislators may get hundreds of e-mails a day, and referencing your identity in the subject line will help them recognize the e-mail.

FYI: Ten tips for effective lobbying

Tip 1: Research your legislators backgrounds, committee assignments and voting records on issues.

Tip 2: Develop relationships with your legislators.

Tip 3: Don't overdo your lobbying. Only communicate when you have something important to say.

Tip 4: Invite your legislator to your school. Plan a tour or invite them to a school board meeting.

Tip 5: Lobby with your real life experience – it's your most persuasive tool.

Tip 6: Set priorities. When everything is important, nothing is important.

Tip 7: Shore up lobbying allies from your community to demonstrate broad support.

Tip 8: Don't forget the media. Getting your message out to the press can influence your legislators and public opinion.

Tip 9: Always be positive and courteous. In politics, there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies.

Tip 10: Everyone likes a pat on the back. Remember to thank each of your legislators for jobs well-done.

SAMPLE: Letter to your lawmaker

(on personal or district letterhead)

*Senator (Representative) Sam Sample
South Dakota Legislature
500 East Capitol Ave
Pierre, SD 57501*

*Dear Senator (Representative) Sam Sample:
(If you know your legislator personally, use their first name).*

I am a school board member from SDTown School District. On behalf of my district, I urge your to support adequate funding for public education, as outlined in Senate Bill 120.

As you may be aware, SDTown School District has already opted-out of the tax limitation, and we have still had to cut more than \$1 million from our budget over the past four years.

This past year, for example, we were forced to eliminate several positions, including a guidance counselor, a curriculum development professional and a social worker. In the past several years, we have been prevented from implementing several programs we believe would have a direct impact on student achievement, including additional professional development for staff and expanded after school tutoring for the students who need additional teacher contact time.

Thank you for your leadership in support of public education. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

*Pat Smith
President,
SDTown School Board
605-555-5555*

SAMPLE: E-mail to your lawmaker

*To: Senator (Representative) Sam Sample
CC: SDTown Board Members, SDTown Superintendent, ASBSD Representative*

SUBJECT: SUPPORT SB 120 - SDTown Board Member

*Dear Senator (Representative) Sam Sample:
(If you know your legislator personally, use their first name).*

I am a school board member from SDTown School District. On behalf of my district, I urge your to support adequate funding for public education, as outlined in Senate Bill 120.

As you may be aware, SDTown School District has already opted-out of the tax limitation, and we have still had to cut more than \$1 million from our budget over the past four years.

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Thank you for your leadership in support of public education. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

*Pat Smith
President,
SDTown School Board
605-555-5555*

Calling Your Legislators

Phone calls are an effective and fast way to communicate with your legislators, especially when a critical vote is coming up. In fact, a personal phone call is the only time you can make sure a legislator has received your advocacy message. Phone calls remind legislators that you are closely monitoring their votes. If you call your legislator and do not reach them, leave a message, but be sure to follow up with an e-mail or fax that states your position.

When phoning a legislator, keep the following in mind:

1. Ask to speak with the legislator directly, or briefly state your position to the person taking the message.
2. Give your name, title and school district.
3. Focus on one issue or bill. Whenever possible, identify the bill by number and name.
4. Briefly state what position you want your member of congress to take on the issue. Be prepared to give a locally-based rationale for your position.
5. Ask for your legislator's position on the bill.
6. If asked, give your address and contact information so you can receive a written response.

» *TIP: Most legislators have Pierre-based phone numbers. If you are calling during the day, call the Senate or House directly.*

Meeting Face-to-Face

Meeting in person with your legislators is the most effective way to make your views known and influence legislation. You can visit your legislators prior to session, or during session at their local crackerbarrels.

In addition to visiting a crackerbarrel, consider inviting your legislators to visit your district to see programs in action. If a face-to-face meeting cannot be arranged, consider setting up a conference call with your legislator and several other education advocates.

Tips for a Successful Meeting

- » Hold a pre-meeting with everyone who will be lobbying to make sure all agree on your position. Try scheduling a half hour meeting prior to crackerbarrels to organize which advocates will ask which questions.
- » Be concise and focus on just a few issues or bills. Remember that your legislator may

have little understanding of a particular bill, so be prepared to educate him or her.

- » Whenever possible, speak from personal experience. Provide brief anecdotal evidence of how this issue effects your local school district, and there for the legislators constituents.
- » Ask directly for your legislators support. If your legislator is supportive, ask him or her to lobby other legislators or to state their position during caucus times. If your legislator disagrees with you, her him or her out politely, express respectful disappointment, and rebut his or her argument if you have the facts to do so. Be courteous – you'll have other issues to take up in the future.
- » Always provide a concise, one-page fact sheet or letter describing your position to be left with the member of congress as a reminder of the issues and your visit.
- » After the meeting, follow up with a letter, e-mail or fax to reinforce your position.
- » Contact ASBSD and let us know how your legislator responded to the issues. Call ASBSD Director of Communications Brian Aust at 605.295.1492 or contact him via e-mail at baust@asbsd.org.

Strengthening Your Message with a Coalition

Coalition building is a natural part of your local leadership as a school board member, and it can be a powerful advocacy tool. When working on a specific lobbying effort, decide if a coalition will help achieve your goals. Think about the nature of the issue – some issues have broader appeal than others. If your issue is strictly a school board issue, pursue it individually or with your board team. However, if the issue impacts all or part of public education in your community, pursue a coalition.

Look to other school boards. Some school districts share a set of legislators – team up to deliver your message. Seek support from administrators, teachers, parents, the local PTA and business leaders. Ask yourself who else has a stake in the outcome of your issue and how important it is to them. Also, consider who may have a particular influence with decision-makers on the issue.

The Five C's of Coalition Building

- » **Consistency.** Focus on one issue and make sure everyone agrees on the message and goal of your advocacy. An easy way to make sure everyone is singing the same tune is to have coalition members sign a "coalition letter" to your legislator that specifically outlines the coalition's position. Make sure to copy ASBSD when you send your coalition letter.
- » **Commitment.** Your issue does not have to be the top priority of every coalition partner – but partners do need to commit to some action that will further the cause. Never have a meeting without giving out assignments – signing on to a joint coalition letter, making a phone call, agreeing to attend a crackerbarrel.
- » **Convenience.** Make getting involved easy for your coalition partners. The easier it is for them, the more likely they will help out.
- » **Communication.** Keep in touch with your allies by phone or e-mail. You can work effectively with groups or individuals even if you rarely see them face-to-face. Regular communication ensures that all coalition partners continue to understand and agree on the goals and message of your advocacy.
- » **Compromise.** Sometimes bringing diverse groups together for a common coal requires compromise along the way. Decide where you have some flexibility that does NOT compromise the overall goal. Compromising on some points that are not truly important to you can gain you the strength of number and diversity of coalition partners.

CHAPTER FOUR: USING THE MEDIA

How to Use the Media to Communicate with Legislators

Never underestimate the power of the press – legislators certainly don't. Many legislators author a weekly column for the local newspapers while the Legislature is in session, which shows how important they believe the local media to be. Legislators look to the media to "take a pulse" on what is important to their constituents. If you educate the media effectively, your view and your issues are likely to get positive press that goes straight to your legislator.

Writing Letters to the editor and Opinion Editorials

Letters-to-the editor and opinion editorials written by readers (called op-eds) are useful ways to speak out on issue, respond to an article or editorial, or express your position in your own words. They are often read by your legislators and double-time as a lobbying tool.

Concentrate on writing letters to the editor or op-eds for your local paper since that will have the greatest impact. Even a letter or op-ed that does not get published is valuable because it may be considered by a newspaper's editorial board reviewing an issue. Or, it may cause the paper to write a story on the topic.

Hints for effective letters to the editor and op-eds

- » Be brief and focus on one issue. If the article is too long, the newspaper may edit out some important facts. Typically, letters to the editor are limited to 200 words, and op-eds should be kept under 500 words. To make sure, review your paper's letter policy, which is usually published on the newspapers' opinion page.
- » For a letter to the editor, refer to a recent event or an article which has appeared in the newspaper and include the article's date and title.
- » When applicable, close your letter or op-ed by asking readers to contact their legislators about the issue.
- » Give your address, school district and

FYI: 10 Tips for Effective Media

- » **Stay local.** One strong article in your hometown newspaper may be worth 10 in the Argus Leader.
- » **Keep focused.** You may have many issues to bring to the media, but stick to one at a time or they will all get buried.
- » **Clip and send your good press.** A good article can have a long life. Make sure to send press clipping to your legislators, coalition partners and other decision makers.
- » **Don't forget your own media outlets.** Take advantage of district newsletters, publications, radio and cable programs to educate and get others involved in your advocacy efforts.
- » **Just the facts.** Stick to what you know and never exaggerate. Remember, you can always get back to reporters after finding the right answer.
- » **Don't just say it – show it.** A demonstration or real-life testimonial illustrates your point and make it more colorful.
- » **Build media relationships.** Get to know the education reports or the editors of the local newspaper, and schedule a meeting with the editorial board.
- » **Put media relations in your advocacy policy.** Media relations should be a year-round function – part of your districts "official" advocacy efforts.
- » **Appoint a press spokesperson for your school board.** This contact person must be fully informed about your school districts positions and about how state-level policy may impact local decisions.
- » **Take full advantage of the all the media outlets.** Perhaps there are two newspapers that serve your local area. Keep radio stations and TV stations in mind, too.

phone number so that newspapers can verify authorship.

- » Clip your letter to the editor or op-ed and mail or fax it to your legislator.

Meeting with Editorial Boards

There is nothing more powerful than a newspaper carrying a positive lead editorial that supports your cause. It is unlikely, however, that this will happen without some footwork. Meeting with editorial boards in advance to explain your views can be the catalyst for a favorable editorial that will address the issue at home as well as in Pierre.

To facilitate a successful meeting:

- » Request a formal meeting by writing a letter to the editorial page editor or by calling the editorial office. Briefly explain the issue you would like to discuss and who will be with you at the meeting.
- » Go the meeting prepared to lay the facts on the table as well as your background materials. If possible, bring the president of your school board and other leaders from a coalition, if one exists, to lend weight to the meeting.
- » Although a face-to-face meeting is more effective, you can also simply write to the editorial page editor, send your background material, and follow-up by phone.
- » When preparing the background material, try to include both the local and broader implications of the issue so the editor can see that it hits home and is of wider concern.
- » Once you have made contact with members of the editorial board, keep that relationship going. Send a thank-you note for the meeting and another note if they run a favorable editorial.

FYI: Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the article "Legislators Say Education is Top Priority" that appeared in the Nov. 8 SDTown News.

Every year going into legislative session, our local legislators tout the importance of education, yet the Legislature has been unable to find a long-term solution for education funding.

Our school district has been improving despite having to cut \$1.6 million in operating expenses, but, we have come to the point where we can no longer cut programs and staff – doing so would hamper the districts ability to continually improve.

I urge our legislators to back Senate Bill 120, which would phase in an additional \$820 per student over the next five years.

By passing SB 120, and increasing state aid to education, the school district can: return opt-out money to local taxpayers; fund after school tutoring programs; allow the district to rehire a guidance counselor to help students transition to college; implement a talented and gifted program; and better compensate our highly-qualified staff.

We have a responsibility to prepare our children for a global economy, and the state has an equal responsibility to ensure SD-Town school district has sufficient resources to be able to do so.

Sincerely,

*Pat Smith
President
SDTown School Board*

CHAPTER FIVE: ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

How to Get Involved in Election Campaigns

Election time is a perfect opportunity for local school board members to bring education issues to the forefront and promote an education agenda. Raising these issues on the campaign trail can persuade current and future lawmakers to make public education a top priority.

Suggested Election Activities

There are proven strategies for engaging candidates in meaningful debate and raising awareness on key education issues. Over the course of a campaign season, and immediately following the election, consider doing the following activities:

Meet, Greet and Debate

- » Use every public forum to discuss candidates' views on education issues, thereby raising the profile of those issues and getting candidates to "go on record."
- » Develop a list of tough questions on important education issues to ask at public campaign forums.
- » Invite candidates to visit your schools so they can see both the successes and challenges in person.
- » Offer to assemble a group of "education experts" to brief candidates.
- » With other local education groups or civic organizations, sponsor a town meeting or debate featuring the candidates to discuss education issues.
- » Meet personally with the candidates to discuss education issues.
- » Write letters to candidates about important education issues and use examples from your district.
- » Support a candidate who shares your views on education.

TIP: Check with ASBSD for a list of questions to ask your legislators prior to the election. Forward them to the local newspaper, and ask that they invite legislators to publicly respond.

Use the Media

- » Submit and op-ed to your local newspaper on the importance of education issues in the campaign.
- » Meet with editorial boards of local newspapers, television and radio stations. Critique for them the candidates' policy positions on education issues, as well as present your school districts agenda.
- » If a candidate makes a campaign appearance without fully addressing campaign issues, write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper and send a copy to the campaign.
- » Utilize radio or public access television to sponsor a candidate debate on education and how the candidates would meet the needs of your school district.

Actions after the Election

- » Meet with your newly elected legislators to discuss how you and other school board members can help legislators with education policy decisions.
- » Invite the newly-elected legislator to visit a school in your district, thereby launching a supportive advocacy relationship.
- » Ask a newly elected legislator with a strong stance on education to request an assignment on a committee that directly affects South Dakota's public schools.
- » Urge the newly elected legislator to form an education advisory committee and volunteer to convene and chair the group.

CHAPTER SIX: YEAR ROUND ADVOCACY

Putting It All Together

In order to have a real impact on state-level policy decisions, remember the golden rule – make a habit out of advocacy.

Effective education advocacy is a year-round job. It's not enough to wait until there is a crisis. To win the advocacy game, you need to work through the year to develop and nurture relationships with your legislators. Generally, that requires passing an advocacy policy for your local school district that state explicitly you district's commitment to advocacy for education, then following up with your regular advocacy actions.

July

It's the start of a new school year, and a good time to decide how your board is going to handle advocacy for the upcoming year. Set up a point person for ASBSD's Legislative Action Network, and collect a current list of legislator contact information for the entire school board to reference. Revisit your advocacy policy to ensure oncoming board members realize your board's commitment to advocacy. Agree on who has the authority to sign lobbying letters and use district letterhead. In general, it's a good time to discuss with the district leadership team how the board and administration will approach advocacy efforts.

August

Start forming a network of local education advocates that will work together in the upcoming session. Seek out other education groups, like members of the PTA and teachers, and also approach other civic groups, religious leaders and community foundations. Talk with them about the successes in your district, and share the challenges. Make sure to tell them how much their support will mean to the students in your community.

September

Invite your legislators to a school social event, like an athletic event or music concert, and recognize them for being there. These events are a goodwill, non-partisan chance for you to cement a tie with your legislator.

October

Use information from the ASBSD region meetings to discuss ASBSD proposed resolutions, and establish legislative priorities for your school district. Make a list of the kind of information you need to support your priorities, and begin gathering it. Once you've come to an agreement, send a letter to your legislators to inform them of your official positions, and ask for their support.

November

With Legislative Session just around the corner, invite your legislators to breakfast to discuss the upcoming session and your district's priorities. Have any supporting information ready. It's a good idea to any members of your local coalition, too. Make sure to ask them to drop you a note when they decide where they are going to hold their crackerbarrels, and ask them how they would prefer to be contacted during the session.

December

Legislative session is a month away, and the press coverage is heating up. Keep informed by reading your local paper, and be prepared to respond with a letter to the editor. Or, shape the debate by authoring an op-ed that clearly defines a key legislative priority and how it will impact your district. Also, attend the ASBSD and SASD Legislative Area meetings to gather with school board members from your region to discuss ideas and interact with legislators.

January

Legislative session kicks off, and you'll have to process a lot of information quickly. Log on to ASBSD.org to see a list of bills that will impact education, and see how they compare to your district's priorities. Keep a close watch for the LAN Dispatch and LAN Alert, which will provide information on legislation as it moves through the process. ASBSD.org's Daily Diary is also a good place to keep up on what is happening, and what is about to happen. Be prepared to call, fax, write or e-mail your legislators. Remember to attend local crackerbarrels to get your advocacy message out.

February

The session is winding down, and most of the major education legislation will be acted on. Be ready to contact your legislators, and encourage the members of your local coalition to be particularly active during crunch time.

March

The session ends, and it's time to evaluate how your legislators supported public education. Prepare a summary of how each legislator voted on key bills, and present that information at your board meeting. Make sure to illustrate the impact their votes had on your district.

April

With the summary prepared, it's reward time. Invite your legislators to be honored guests at a school function, and make light of their contribution to your district. Present them with a plaque or framed certificate to make it official and say "thanks for a job well done."

May

If your graduation is in May, send a personal letter inviting your legislators to attend. Graduation is the reason K-12 education exists, and legislators seeing that first hand is a positive reinforcement that their actions impact the lives of so many children.

June

Districts are building budgets, and it's a good time to invite legislators in to see how their decisions impact education programming at the local level.

FYI: Advocacy Resources

ASBSD is committed to acting as our members' leading advocacy resource. We have a number of tools that will help you be a more effective advocate.

- » ASBSD Staff. Our knowledgeable staff has experience with the spectrum of advocacy issues. Don't hesitate to call or e-mail ASBSD staff with your questions.
- » ASBSD.org. ASBSD's web site is our a central resource for all your advocacy needs. Visit www.asbsd.org often for updates.
- » Open Forum Blog. ASBSD's edublog, called Open Forum, is a go-to resource for the latest information on statewide education policy. During session, ASBSD staff updates the Open Forum several times a day with the latest developments from Pierre.
- » ASBSD Bill Tracker. Our dynamic bill tracker allows you to follow legislation through every step of the political process. The full-featured resource also contains legislator voting history and links to ASBSD testimony.
- » ASBSD Testimony. ASBSD staff offers testimony on important legislation. Visit ASBSD.org or access the ASBSD Bill Tracker to find links to ASBSD testimony. Use the arguments from ASBSD testimony to create talking points for your communications with legislators.
- » ASBSD Legislative Action Network. This group of board member advocates receives special communications during session - make sure your board has appointed a LAN member.
- » LAN Dispatch. Sent out twice a week during session, LAN dispatch features the latest news, analysis and advocacy messages from Pierre.
- » LAN Alert. Sent out when the need arises, LAN Alert gives you a heads-up when your immediate attention is required.