

What school boards accomplish for their students is determined in large part by state and federal officials. To help determine how these officials will vote on issues important to public schools, educators need a comprehensive plan.

Effective advocacy requires the following steps:

1. FOCUS

Determine priorities. Concentrate on one to three issues per year. A limited agenda allows a focus of energy and more likelihood of success. If you try for everything, you get nothing.

Ensure priorities are GROUP priorities. Involve as many members as possible in developing priorities. Seek unanimous support. Cement agreements and develop consensus on dealing with any internal controversy. To succeed, all members of the group must carry the same message.



2. DATA

Know the issues. Collect accurate, relevant, objective data supporting your positions. Inaccurate figures that place legislators in embarrassing positions, or that prove you inept, ruin your credibility.

Know the arena. Keep current on pending bills (by number), their intent, specific repercussions, and forces working for and against them. Use opposing viewpoints to develop more effective arguments.

3. STATEMENTS

Prepare position papers. State general principles in papers to distribute widely to officials, the media, and your constituents.

Produce memoranda on two or three hot issues, providing detailed arguments and including references to any relevant legislation by name and bill number.

Make a persuasive case. State the problem and your solution. Be specific: translate your request into budget or property tax dollars. Request that the local delegation work together to achieve the best solutions.

Be clear, concise, concrete, correct.



4. COALITIONS

Identify groups and noted individuals who share your goal. Broad-based coalitions are taken more seriously. Seek non-traditional partners (i.e.: employees, PTSAs, League of Women Voters, taxpayer groups).

Create common interest groups on particular issues. Build separate alliances for each issue. Coalitions require compromise (e.g., work with unions to win tenure reform). There is no need to agree with such groups on all issues in order to act together on some.



To Advocate Effectively

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5. PUBLICITY

Keep constituents informed. You might gain some non-traditional partners.

Keep the media informed. Send them your statements; meet with editors and reporters about vital issues.

Write letters to the editor. Seek volunteers; provide data, guidance, and submission schedule. Send copies to relevant law makers.



6. RELATIONSHIPS

Know your law makers. Know their priorities and voting records; present your case to appear consistent with their voting records.

Be polite. Thank officials for previous support. Avoid personal attacks. Contribute your time or resources to re-elect legislators who support you.

Know key staff people. Meetings with staff members can be very useful--legislators seek their input. Staff people are potential powerful allies.

Meet frequently with law makers. Invite legislators to your district and provide them with positive exposure. Meet with them in their local offices *and* in Albany or Washington.

7. COMMUNICATIONS

THROUGH MEETINGS

Before meetings:

Identify 2-3 issues to discuss, and develop supporting cases. To ensure a consistent message, prepare an outline of points to guide discussion and leave behind. (Inconsistency undermines credibility.) Prepare responses to counter arguments. Identify spokespersons and provide them with all relevant information. Check the status of relevant bills on the day before you are scheduled to meet; get all bill numbers.

During meetings:

Be prompt. Wear identification. Take notes. Introduce yourself and your affiliations. Be polite to everyone. Avoid confrontation. Be firm; help the group stick to its agenda. Present your case using the pre-developed meeting guide. Seek a commitment, but don't interpret lack of commitment as opposition. Don't negotiate away your case from the start. Demand *your* rights, not those of others. Never guess. If you don't know an answer, volunteer to send the information by mail. Provide a written fact sheet.

After meetings:

Promptly mail a letter of summarization and appreciation, including any promised additional information.



7. COMMUNICATIONS

AS TESTIMONY

Prepare a written statement that includes your best arguments briefly, with relevant accurate data, without repetition. Use simple, direct language. State your willingness to provide additional data if needed. Provide an executive summary. You may have time to speak only from this one page at the hearing. Sign up early to testify. Make enough copies for the committee, media and interested others. Know the concerns of those on the hearing panel; anticipate and prepare to answer questions.

Speak to the panel, not the audience or media. Try to speak, not read. Pay attention to what others have already testified; try not to repeat what others have already said. Begin with your name, title, appreciation of the opportunity to contribute, and your position regarding the issue. Be positive. Close with a very brief summary and an offer to answer questions. Take time to think before responding to questions.

Remain in the hearing room for a few minutes to answer questions. Plan follow-up activities to maintain contact with committee staff.



7. COMMUNICATIONS

BY PHONE or EMAIL

Identify yourself and affiliation. Identify by name and number the bill of concern. Briefly state your position. Seek the legislator's support for your position. Be positive; offer to send further information; state appreciation.

IN CORRESPONDENCE

For priority issues organize writing campaigns. Provide proto-types including data, but have writers use their own words. (Guidelines for letters are found in MCSBA's *Legislative Committee Handbook*.) Seek time during a meeting for writing letters or postcards. Write only about priorities. Follow-up letters on a single issue can make a strong impact.



8. PERSISTENCE

Be persistent. Some issues take many years to resolve. Keep trying.

Be quick! Late in the session, bills can move very quickly. Have a plan for instant reaction to sudden developments.