

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE EDUCATION ADVOCACY



ARKANSAS SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

Serving & Supporting Boards of Education Since 1957

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The Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA) supports local boards in fulfilling their multiple roles through professional development, advocacy and member services. ASBA is pleased to provide this Advocacy Toolkit to assist local boards of education and individual board members to engage in successful advocacy efforts on behalf of students in local school systems and throughout the state. As one of the three core areas of services provided by ASBA, the goal of the Association's advocacy service center is to provide our members with the information they need to be advocates for public schools, for local board governance of education and for the continued leadership and legal authority of school boards.



This Advocacy Toolkit is intended to complement board and board member efforts by providing information, including a glossary of terms, and resources to locate contact information for local, state and federal officials.

Why is advocacy so important?

- Board member service is grounded in a commitment to ensuring that all students receive a high-quality public education.
- Board members serve a prominent leadership role in governing school systems, demanding an understanding of what is necessary to provide, sustain, and improve the quality of public education.
- At a time when competing messages are being heard, the voice of those representing the best interests of public-school students also must be heard.
- Board members must engage in adopting annual budgets based on the state, local, and federal funding provided, and be adept at seeking sufficient revenues to support outstanding schools.
- Board members are in a unique position to advocate for the programs and resources for successful local school systems, and to collaborate on behalf of all students attending Arkansas's school systems.

Does advocacy by board members really make a difference? Yes, it does!

- Board members are in a unique position to educate and influence the legislative process. Board members are servant volunteers elected by a majority of voters in their zone or district.
- Board members are able to provide information about education policy from a local perspective.
- As the policymakers for the school districts, board members play an integral role in conjunction with state and federal legislators and the state board to carry out the mission of educating all students.

Becoming an Advocate, Becoming Informed

“Lobbying” is defined as an organized attempt to influence decision-makers on a particular issue. Therefore, a critical first step in effective advocacy is “getting organized” by becoming more informed about both the policy issues and the legislative arena in which they are being debated and decided. Board members must be informed on key policy issues and have access to more specific and detailed information as needed. Board members typically bring a wealth of professional knowledge, whether from the parent advocate, business leader, or retired educator’s perspective. Complementing existing strengths through preparation on specific issues makes for a more confident and well-rounded advocate. There are many resources available to help build a working knowledge of the issues that impact public education:

ASBA Resources

The Advocacy section of ASBA’s website has a wealth of information:

- Links to locate Arkansas legislator contact information.

Arkansas General Assembly Resources

- The Arkansas General Assembly’s website (www.arkleg.state.ar.us) is an excellent resource for session information, legislator contact information, House and Senate agendas, and information on bill status.

Division of Elementary and Secondary Education of the Arkansas Department of Education Resources

- The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education of the Arkansas Department of Education (DESE) website (dese.ade.arkansas.gov) is an excellent resource for information on ADE divisions and programs, the State Board’s



meeting calendar, agendas and minutes and ADE publications and reports on numerous priority issues.

Consortium of State School Boards Association (COSSBA) Resources

- COSSBA's website (www.cossba.org) has a great deal of public education information from the national perspective.

Knowing your elected officials

Whether it is the state legislators in Little Rock, local county executives, mayors, commissioners, and council members, or U.S. Senators and Representatives in Washington, D.C., it is important to be familiar with elected officials and the roles they play regarding public education. Boards of education typically do, and certainly should, conduct legislative meetings with local, state, and federal elected officials. Most common are annual meetings with state delegations to review and discuss legislative priorities.

Tips for Effective Advocacy

- Keep it simple—most issues can be explained, and a position stated, in a few sentences.
- Use the tool that works for you—call, write a letter, email or schedule a meeting.
- Speak up to be heard on key public education issues—actions and inactions count.
- Set priorities—when everything is important, nothing is important.
- Be direct—make specific requests for specific positions and actions.
- Keep it local—highlight the pros or cons of legislation on the local school system.
- Be a team player—be sure that your advocacy efforts conform to your local board's policies and protocols.
- Join forces—remind legislators of any association, coalition or other stakeholder support for your position.

- Be an educator—invite elected officials to visit local schools to showcase successful programs.
- State the positive—be enthusiastic and courteous.
- Say thank you—remember to thank each of the elected officials for their
- Follow up—be sure to provide any information offered or requested.
- Share your experience—your fellow board members can benefit from what you’ve learned.
- Relax! Effective advocates do not need to be polished, professional lobbyists.

Contacting Elected Officials

Regularly contacting legislators and developing a relationship with them assists them in making well-informed decisions regarding education. Ideally, legislators will reciprocate by seeking your input as issues are being considered. Letters, emails and telephone calls are all effective tools when used correctly. Given the volume of letters and calls a legislator receives, it is important to focus your advocacy efforts.

Make a Phone Call

Phone calls are an effective and fast way to communicate with a legislator, especially when a critical vote is coming up. Sometimes, an in-depth conversation with a legislator is possible; at other times, a call may simply be tallied by staff, and the legislators are given counts of constituents for and against the particular issue. Be sure to let staff know you are a school board member, as the legislator may take your call.

When Calling During a Legislative Session

- Ask to speak with the senator or representative but be prepared to leave a short message.
- Give your name, title and the name of the school board on which you serve.
- Focus the call on one issue or bill and, if possible, identify the bill by number. Briefly state what position you wish the legislator to take and be prepared to offer a rationale based on local impact.

- Always ask what position the legislator will be taking on the bill or issue.

When Calling During the Interim

- Give your name, title and the name of the school board on which you serve.
- You may have to schedule a time to speak with the legislator; remember most legislators have full-time jobs during the interim.
- Focus your conversation on one or two top priorities, remembering that the immediate goal is to introduce yourself as a resource for the legislator on education issues.

Send an Email

- Open your email by clearly stating your position in the first paragraph.
- Keep your email brief and to the point. An email that is one or two paragraphs is appropriate.
- Stick to one or two issues and clearly identify them. A one-sentence description is fine. Give a bill number if you have one.
- Personalize your email. It's okay to disagree with the legislator, but never attack him/her personally.
- Always ask the legislator to respond with his/her position on the legislation you are contacting them about. You need to know where they stand.
- Conclude your email by thanking him/her for taking the time to consider your views.

Write a Letter

While a slower method of communication, letters remain an effective tool in advocacy. Legislators often are heard appreciating the time and effort it takes to write a letter.

When writing, keep the following in mind:

- Focus on one issue or bill per letter and identify the bill by name and number.
- Express your point of view and explain why the legislator should support or oppose; be brief and courteous.

- Briefly explain the local impact of the legislation—just the facts.
- Request that the legislator take a specific position on the bill.
- Ask them to co-sponsor the bill or to vote for its passage.
- Ask for a response from the legislator.
- When writing an individual letter, use your signature and personal letterhead and state that you are a board member. If it is a collective letter written by the board, have the chair sign it and put it on the board’s letterhead. Again, always be sure that your local advocacy efforts conform to your local board’s positions, policies and protocols.
- Letters provide a unique opportunity to enclose additional material such as testimony and resolutions, copies of related correspondence, and the handwritten touch.

Sample Letter

Date

Your Name and Address

Dear Senator _____:

I am writing as president/chair of the _____ Board of Education. On behalf of our school board and our system, I urge you to support SB _____, which will _____.

With the enactment of SB _____ our school system will be able to [insert local information.]

Thank you for your leadership in support of public education and Arkansas’s outstanding public schools. Please let me know your position on this issue.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe, President
 _____ Board of Education
 501.000.0000
 jdoe@anyschool.org

Meeting with Elected Officials

Meeting in person with a legislator is the most effective way to share the board's position and influence legislation. Visit state leaders in Little Rock or meet with them when they are in their home district. During legislative sessions, legislators often hold town hall meetings in their districts or attend other community functions. Also, consider inviting a legislator to visit a school in your system to tour facilities or see programs in action.



HOW TO SCHEDULE MEETINGS

Write or call the legislator's office and ask to schedule a meeting. State the subject(s) to be discussed and the time needed. Most meetings last 15 to 20 minutes, although they can last longer, especially if a group or coalition of people is included.

Depending on the issue, arrange to make a visit along with several other board members, educators or community members to demonstrate broad support for your position. Let the legislator's office know who will be attending.

Call ASBA's office to advise, as there are often details and background information that ASBA can provide.

Ten Commandments of Lobbying

1. **Never lie or mislead a legislator** about the facts of an issue, its relative importance, the opposition's position or strength, or any other matter.
2. **Look for friends in unusual places.** In politics, a friend is someone who works with you on a particular issue, whether Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative. A friend on one issue may oppose you on every other issue.
3. **Never cut off anyone from permanent contact.** Don't let a legislator (or another lobbyist) consider you a bitter enemy just because you disagree. Today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally.
4. **Don't grab credit.** What you and your group want from the process is public policy that is in line with your interests. Legislators and others may want the public credit. Let them have it. Nothing is impossible if it doesn't matter who gets the credit.
5. **Make your word your bond.** Don't make promises you aren't positive you can keep.
6. **Don't lobby opponents who are publicly committed to their positions.** Doing so will waste your time and further alienate them.
7. **Always notice and thank everyone who has helped you.** People like to be appreciated, and it costs nothing to say, "Thanks!" A person who feels unappreciated will probably not help you again and may even go out of his or her way to oppose you.
8. **Don't gossip.** Knowing legislators' peculiarities is one thing; talking about them is another. If you get the reputation of telling everything you know, you'll soon find that no one will tell you anything.
9. **Do your homework.** There is no excuse for not having the facts to support your case when you need them. It makes you look unprofessional and reduces your credibility.
10. **Be there.** You can know your opponent; you can develop imaginative and reasonable compromises; you can burn the midnight oil to digest all the arguments. But you must be in the right place at the right time to win the day.

Glossary of Legislative Terms

Agenda—The proposed order of business for a meeting.

Act—A bill that has been made law by passing both houses of the legislature and signed by the governor, filed without the governor's signature, or passed by both houses of the legislature over the governor's veto.

Adopt—To approve formally.

Amendment—An alteration made or proposed to be made to a bill. Bills may be amended more than once.

Appropriation—A sum of money designated for a particular purpose by an Act. For example, an appropriations bill funds a state agency over the upcoming fiscal year.

Biennium—A two-year period.

Bill—A measure that creates new law, amends or repeals existing law, appropriates money, prescribes fees, transfers functions from one agency to another, provides penalties, or takes other action.

- HB1001—This would be a bill generated in the House of Representatives.
- SB23—This would be a bill generated in the Senate.

Capital—May refer to the capital city of the state (Little Rock is the capital of Arkansas).

Capitol—Refers to a building where the legislative body of government meets.

Caucus—Used as both a noun and a verb. A caucus (n) is a group of people who share something in common. For example, they are members of the same political party. When these people caucus (v), they meet to address their group's policy questions and select political candidates for office or political party leaders.

Chair—The legislator who presides over an individual committee; for example, the Chair of the Senate Education Committee. In the House, the chair of a committee is selected by the Speaker of the House. In the Senate, a Senator gets to select themselves as chair during the committee selection process.

Chamber—The official hall for the meeting of a legislative body.

Companion Bill—A bill introduced in the same form in both the House and Senate. A companion bill is commonly referred to as a mirror bill because the language of each bill is identical.

Constituent—A citizen residing within the district of a legislator (or other elected official).

District—A geographical area designated for representation by a senator or representative.

Do Pass—The recommendation by a committee for passage.

Emergency Clause—A statement added to the end of a measure that causes the Act to become effective before the accustomed date. An emergency clause makes a bill effective immediately upon the signature of the Governor or at another designated date.

Engrossed Bill—A bill that has been amended and had the amended language incorporated into the language of the bill.

Floor Resolution—Floor resolutions, which may be offered from the floor of either house, usually honor or commemorate an individual, organization, or event.

Gallery—Areas of both chambers where public visitors may observe the legislature in session.