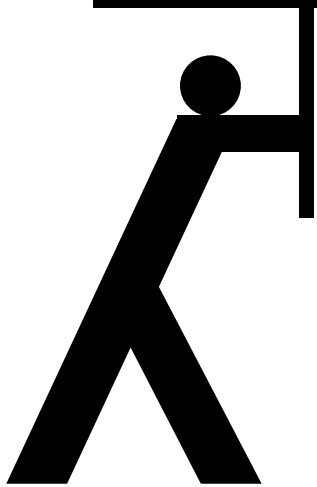


A school leader's guide to

POWERFUL EDUCATION ADVOCACY



importance of advocacy effective lobbying strategies
meeting with your legislators tips for effective media

The gavel goes down at the close of another school committee meeting. Some important decisions were made, but do these views reverberate in halls on Beacon and Capitol Hills? They should. Because in those halls other decisions are being made that will impact your district and those across the state—possibly for years to come.

That is why advocacy for public education is such an important responsibility for every school committee member and education leader.


WHY IS YOUR ADVOCACY SO IMPORTANT?

Your advocacy is critical because, as an education leader, you have firsthand understanding of what is needed to ensure the best education for public school children in Massachusetts. You have an important message to deliver to state and federal legislative leaders, the Administration, the media and your local community. In this time of shrinking budgets, government leaders must understand that the education of our children is too important an investment to be placed on the proverbial chopping block.

CAN YOU REALLY HAVE AN IMPACT?

As school leaders and elected officials, you have the political clout to influence public policy decisions that affect your school district. Legislative leaders do listen to their constituents, particularly those who have knowledge in the area they are advocating. As someone who is truly on the front lines of education, you are in a position to explain the real-life impact of legislative decisions on schools and school children. In this role, you are also an invaluable source of information for legislators.

Legislators value clear, concise and informative communication from education advocates. In particular, school committee members and school administrators are in a good position to know what policies work and don't work in public schools. Here are some proven means to help you communicate more effectively with your legislators.



how to make your voice heard

Know your legislators. Take the time to assemble information about your legislators before you contact them. This may influence the arguments you make and the action you take. Critical pieces of the puzzle can include:

Committee assignments. Note on which committees your legislators serve and what role they play in achieving your advocacy objectives. (The committees your legislators sit on are good indicators of their primary areas of interest and influence.)

Voting records. Know how your legislators voted in the past on key education issues. This may help you shape your arguments when you present the issue at hand.

Background information. Having some background information about your legislators can help you establish ties. Where did each go to grade school? high school? college? You may, for instance, be able to invite your legislator back to his or her own school to see first-hand the impact of legislative policies and programs.

Meeting with your legislators.

Meeting in person with your legislators is the most effective way to make your views known and influence legislation. You can visit your senators and representatives at the State House offices in Boston or at their district offices. Legislators usually schedule specific days in which they are in the district office and available to meet with constituents. In addition, you might want to consider inviting your legislators to visit your schools in order to see programs in action or attend a specific event.



using the media to communicate your message

Never underestimate the power of the press.

Not only does it help shape public opinion, it can be one of the most influential advocacy tools. Members of the legislature 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 will be seen not only by your legislative leaders but other members of your community. Below are some effective strategies for working with the media.

Stay local. One strong article in your hometown paper may be worth ten in the *New York Times*.

Keep it focused. You may have a number of issues but present only one at a time or they will all get buried.

A good article can have a long life. Clip and send your good press to your legislators and other decision-makers.

Don't forget your own media outlets. Take advantage of school district newsletters, publications, radio and cable programs to educate and get others involved in your advocacy campaigns.

Just the facts. Stick to what you know and never exaggerate. Remember, you can always get back to reporters after finding the right answer.

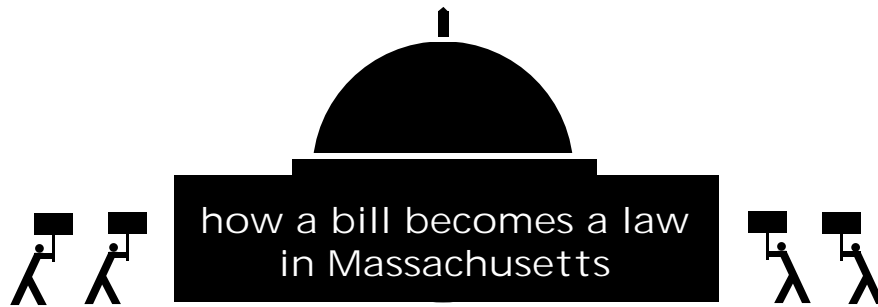
Don't just say it, show it. A demonstration or real life testimonial goes a long way to illustrate your point.

Build media relationships. Get to know education reporters and take the time to meet with editorial boards.

Make media relations a year-round function, not just when you have a pressing concern.

Appoint a press spokesperson for your school committee. This contact person must be fully informed about your agenda and know what to tell and what not to tell reporters.

They say the legislature works in mysterious ways. However, there is a method to its madness. Once you know the process by which bills become law, you can determine when and how to most effectively influence the decisions made by your legislators.



1. Introduction of bill

A member of the legislature introduces a new piece of legislation (which may include petitions filed by Massachusetts citizens or organizations). A bill can be introduced in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, except that funding bills start in the House. A bill number is assigned (S.1, for instance, for the first Senate bill introduced; or H.R. 50 for the fiftieth bill introduced in the House).

2. Committee consideration

The bill is next assigned to the appropriate committee for consideration. That committee must hold a public hearing where interested parties can testify for and against the bill. The committee will then decide whether to report the bill out of committee as "ought to pass" or "ought not to pass." When adverse reports of committees are accepted by the branch in which such petitions originated, the matter is usually disposed of for the session.

3. First reading

When a bill is reported out of committee it is forwarded to all members of the branch in which it was introduced. This is referred to as being in First Reading. The bill is then placed on the Orders of the Day for the succeeding legislative day without debate. Following this, the bill may be sent either to the respective branch's Ways and Means Committee or referred for a Second Reading.

4. Second Reading:

At this time the bill may come up for debate, after which one of the following actions may be taken: The bill can be: tabled; postponed; sent back to the original committee; amended; substituted by another bill; or referred to the next annual session.

5. Third Reading

If none of the above actions is taken, the bill is referred to the Committee on Bills in the Third Reading and placed on the Orders of the Day for the next legislative day. The Committee then decides whether the bill shall be passed to be engrossed (incorporated into final written format). If the vote is negative, the bill is rejected; if affirmative, the bill is referred to the other branch, which follows the same legislative procedures. In some cases, a joint House/Senate subcommittee will rewrite the bill.

6. Signatures by the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate
These are required for any bill surviving the above procedures prior to its being sent to the Governor for final signature.

7. The bill becomes law or is vetoed:

Under the Constitution, the Governor has ten days, not including Sundays and legal holidays, to take action on the bill. If s/he signs a bill, it becomes law 90 days following the date of signing. (Laws containing an emergency preamble become effective immediately.) If the Governor takes no action within ten days, the bill becomes law without a signature, except when the legislature adjourns before the ten-day period has expired. Then if the Governor has not signed it, it does not become law (this is known as a pocket veto). If the Governor has objections, s/he may return the bill with a statement of objections in writing (a veto) to the branch in which it originated, where the bill is considered again. If two-thirds of the members present in that branch vote to pass the bill over the Governor's objections, it is sent to the other branch where it must also receive a two-thirds vote in order to become law.



TIPS:
effective
lobbying

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

Develop relationships with your legislators and their aides by making advocacy a year-round commitment.

Don't overdo your lobbying. Only write when you have something important to say.

Invite your legislators to visit your schools. Plan a tour of one or more schools to showcase successful programs in action.

Lobby with real life experience. It's your most persuasive tool.

Set priorities. When everything is important, nothing is important.

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

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

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

Everyone likes a pat on the back. Remember to thank your legislators for a job well done.

Hold a pre-meeting with everyone who will be attending the meeting with you to make sure all agree on the position to be presented. Decide in advance who will discuss which points so that your visit will run smoothly.

Be concise and focus on just a few issues or bills.

Whenever possible, speak from personal experience. Provide brief anecdotal evidence of how this issue affects your local school district.

Ask directly for your legislator's support. If your legislator is supportive, ask him or her to encourage other members to support your

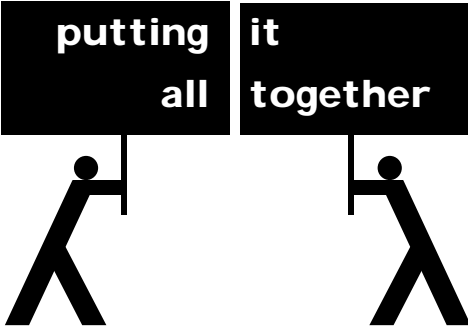
position. If your legislator disagrees with you, hear him/her out politely, express respectful disappointment and rebut his/her argument if you have the facts to do so. Be courteous: you'll have other issues to take up in the future.

Provide a concise one-page fact sheet or letter describing your position which can be left with the legislator as a reminder of the issues and your visit.

After the meeting, write a letter to thank your legislator for his or her time and reinforce your position.



TIPS:
successful
meetings



putting all
it together

In order to have a real impact on the policy decisions made on Beacon Hill and Capitol Hill, remember the golden rule—make a habit out of advocacy.

Effective advocacy for education is a year-round job. It's not enough to wait until there is a crisis in the district or funding for education programs is on the chopping block. To win in the advocacy game, you need to work throughout the year to develop and nurture relationships with your legislators and their staff. You may find it helpful to establish an advocacy policy for your school district that state's explicitly your district's commitment to advocacy for education and follow that up with regular advocacy actions. These could include meeting with your legislators at their state house or district office, inviting your legislators to visit particular school programs or speak at back-to-school or other special events, and lobbying letters or phone calls to your legislators stating your position on specific education-related legislation.