



Advocating

for Students in the Community and at the Legislature

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Advocacy by school board members on behalf of Arizona's 1 million public school students is such a critical part of boardsmanship it is contained in the vision statement of ASBA: Quality leadership and advocacy for children in public schools.

In fact, advocating for students in your school district and throughout the state of Arizona is inherent in your role as an elected policy maker. As a board member, you are an ambassador for your schools and students. You have the unique expertise about your school district and students that makes you a natural leader and best suited to inspire others to use their passion for public education to influence policymakers and help shape the future of education in Arizona.

What Is Advocacy?

Advocacy comes in many different forms – from direct lobbying to working with others as part of a coalition. In general, anytime you are working to influence decision-makers to policy creation, you are advocating. Generally, advocacy for public education is focused on the Arizona Legislature because this is where many important decisions – including the state budget – are made. However, it is important to remember that many other decision makers need to hear from you too. City councils, the State Board of Education and business and community groups all need your expertise and passion for public schools.

Learn the Issues

Part of your responsibility as a board member is to be well-informed on important education issues facing your district and students. Ensure you are learning all you can about education issues facing your district and if there is an area in which you're especially interested or that is unique to your district and its students, become an expert. Use this knowledge to become a resource for your legislators – let them know that you are the person to contact for accurate, reliable information regarding public schools in Arizona!

Utilize Available Resources

There are many resources available to assist your advocacy efforts at the Legislature and in the community. Start with the ASBA website (www.azsba.org) to hear the latest news from the Arizona Capitol with the Daily In-Session Updates and review all education legislation in the Comprehensive Brief. In addition, ASBA's Advocacy Guide provides step-by-step instructions on how to navigate the legislative process

and become an effective advocate. Consider joining ASBA Advocates! and work with ASBA staff and other school board members to connect with your legislators to make your voice heard at the Capital. Finally, join ASBA on Facebook and get the latest updates on issues facing public schools in Arizona and connect with other advocates statewide.

Join in the ASBA Political Agenda Process

The ASBA Political Agenda shapes the policy positions of ASBA at the legislature and in the courts. This exciting democratic process is your chance to influence the legislative and legal priorities of the association – and it is critical to understand the process in order to make the most impact. Make the discussion of the Political Agenda a topic at your board meeting and send a well-informed delegate to the June Delegate Assembly. In addition, participate in the creation of ASBA's Top 10 Priorities – understand the top 10 and advocate for them. (Please refer to the article in the Spring 2010 ASBA Journal for a detailed description of the process.)

Get Involved with Bond and Override Committees

School board members need to understand the important role they play in the success of bond and override campaigns. Working on these committees is a great opportunity to speak to varied audiences on behalf of your schools and expand your sphere of influence.

Be Vocal

In order to be a champion for your school district and students you must get the word out about your district's needs and challenges. Get creative and utilize the communications tools you're most comfortable with (email, Facebook, Twitter or face-to-face meetings). In addition to sharing needs and challenges, you must also share the good news in your district – especially with local media. Write a letter to the editor and let people know your schools are worthy of investment. Consider adding a "celebration" component to your board meeting agendas.

Get Involved Politically

It doesn't matter which side of the aisle you choose – learn about candidates and find out if they support public education. PACs are a great way to get involved in campaigns at every level and learn more about the campaign process. Of course, the best way to have a say is to VOTE – and encourage others to do so, too! ■