

Tips for Effective Advocacy

Get to know local legislators and their staff. It helps to know local legislators on a first-name basis and to make sure they know you by name. Also, get to know legislative district office staff and understand the role, the importance and the power of legislative staff.

Get to know your legislator's interests. Some legislators have particular areas of interests and are especially appreciative when you can help provide them with information or data about these areas.

Become familiar with the legislative process, legislative calendar and composition of key committees. Understanding the political process will allow you to schedule activities so as to be most effective in influencing legislative decisions.

Be prepared for meetings with legislators. Make sure you understand the issues thoroughly, and are prepared to discuss issues and present facts. Also be prepared to respond to concerns raised.

Keep current on legislative issues. CSBA Legislative Action Alerts and publications are a good way to stay on top of legislation impacting education.

Tell the truth. Truth telling is crucial to making long-term relationships work successfully. Always try to answer a legislator's questions succinctly and in an honest and straightforward manner.

Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I will try to find out and get the information to you later." It is better to admit when you don't have an answer than to make it up and potentially give misinformation.



Share information. You can become a valuable resource to legislators if they know they can turn to you for a truthful answer or objective information about an issue. You can facilitate this process by occasionally providing legislators with news articles, reports or tidbits of information that you think they might be particularly interested in.

Show appreciation for the legislator's service, past votes or current position. Legislators, like everyone else, get tired of only hearing complaints. Let them know when you support their positions, too. Invite legislators to visit schools. Invite them on-site to see exciting programs in the district's schools, as well as negative conditions. The best time to do this is September through December when the Legislature is generally out of session and legislators are in their district.

Find areas of common agreement. A good way to foster a positive relationship with a legislator is to identify a common concern or issue and develop a plan to work toward accomplishing it.

Don't allow a disagreement over a position to end in harsh words or personal remarks. Keep the visit professional. Never be abusive or threaten defeat in the next election.

Don't hold a grudge when legislators disagree with your district's position. The board needs to understand the reason for a legislator's position and continue to work with the legislator on the next issue. Legislators should be assessed based on consistent, long-term support for education issues.

*[Note — These legislative advocacy tips were taken from several sources, including CSBA materials, the National School Boards Association and Nancy M. LaCasse's book *Impacting the Legislative Process*, published by School Services of California, 1995.]*