Your Advocacy Guide During the 2017 Legislative Recess

Key Legislative Issues 1-2

Extension of the State Penny Sales Tax for School Infrastructure
School Flexibility
Supplemental State Aid
Educational Savings Accounts

Grassroots Engagement 3-5

Holding Effective Legislator Meetings
Community Engagement
Traditional and Social Media

Resources at Your Fingertips 6-8

IASB Issue Toolkits
IASB Legislator Look-Up Tool
Committee Assignments
INTRODUCTION

It’s time to rethink advocacy. It’s not once a year, during the annual Iowa Association of School Boards Day on the Hill. It’s not just when the Iowa Legislature is in session. And it’s not only during the school year. Advocacy is a year-long activity. It’s about building relationships and telling the story of public education.

During the legislative interim, your legislators are back in their home districts. So what does this mean for you, as a school board member? It means you have multiple opportunities to interact and visit one-on-one with your legislators, and invite them into your school buildings.

You may have heard that a lot of public policy proposals are decided outside of the legislative session, when legislators are meeting with their constituents and listening to their ideas and concerns. This is true! Legislators participate in many public events during the summer and fall months such as parades, festivals and community activities around the state. As a locally elected school board member, you are an influential member of your community and an effective advocate for your district and for schools across Iowa.

This advocacy guide will give you background information on key issues schools are facing today and a sneak peek at what’s coming down the pipeline during the 2018 legislative session. This guide also offers suggested talking points and tips to help you as you meet with your legislators and IASB resources to help you advocate on behalf of your district.
KEY LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

Extension of the State Penny for School Infrastructure

In 2008, the Iowa Legislature passed a law that committed a one-cent state sales tax to provide an equitable and secure funding source for school infrastructure needs. The Secure an Advanced Vision for Education (SAVE), otherwise known as the state penny, is a crucial funding stream that ensures Iowa students have safe, modern school facilities and 21st technology for learning. It is also a key component of property tax relief at the local level.

SAVE is set to expire on January 1, 2030. During the 2017 legislative session, House File 230 (HF 230) was introduced and would have extended the state penny for an additional 20 years to January 1, 2050. The bill was assigned to the House Ways & Means Committee and has yet to have a full committee vote.

ASK: We urge you to contact your legislators, especially those legislators that sit on the House Ways & Means Committee (a chart of those committee members is listed on page 7) to pass HF 230 in its current form during the 2018 legislative session.

School Flexibility

In 2017, the Iowa Legislature provided districts funding flexibility by expanding the uses of certain categorical funds. It also provided a flex fund for end fund balances on specific categorical funds which can be used on any general fund expenditure. The legislature passed limited Home Rule authority for school districts, to give school boards the authority to innovate and use district resources to increase student achievement in ways they could not under Dillon’s Rule.

The legislature also placed an emphasis on giving deference to local school board decisions on the uses of certain categorical funds and general fund expenditures.

ASK: Let IASB and your legislators know your ideas and needs that would provide additional avenues for greater flexibility from regulations in the Iowa Code, allowing for more innovation, efficiency and responsiveness to parent and community needs.
Supplemental State Aid

Supplemental State Aid (SSA) is the rate that is used to increase the per pupil funding amounts which generates school aid funding for all districts. Districts plan around the SSA rate, set by the legislature, to determine what programs are offered, staff capacity and compensation and planning for future district needs.

Over the last several years the vast majority of school districts have received less state aid than what they needed to run their schools. School boards have had to make difficult decisions on where to make budget reductions. It is imperative that districts learn the amount of new money as soon as possible so they can properly budget to provide the best education for the students in their respective districts.

**ASK:** Urge legislators to set the supplemental state aid rate within the first 30 days of the legislative session and set it for the highest amount possible.

Educational Savings Accounts

Throughout the country, there is a push to expand school choice options, such as Educational Savings Accounts (ESA), or vouchers. There is significant interest in the Iowa Legislature to explore such options. IASB believes that lawmakers should examine and support existing forms of school choice currently offered by Iowa’s public schools. These options include open enrollment, establishing charter and online schools under the sole authority of the locally elected school board, investing in magnet and innovation schools and creating greater partnerships among schools and community organizations.

IASB believes that public funds should not be used directly or indirectly to fund nonpublic education. We urge full accountability of taxpayer dollars for any educational purpose. Establishing a voucher system that pits public schools against nonpublic schools would erode the historical partnership and cooperation between both entities.

**ASK:** We urge both the legislature and the governor to support the great work that Iowa public schools are doing to ensure every child is prepared for college, careers and citizenship. We ask them to support the range of current choices offered by Iowa public schools.
The interim or recess of the Iowa Legislature provides school board members with great opportunities to build a relationship with their legislators. Building a strong working relationship is one of the most important aspects of advocacy. Becoming that political influencer does not happen overnight. Below, you will find tips for how you can engage your legislators and share the successes and needs of your school district.

**Effective Legislator Meetings**

How can you influence legislators and help them understand that their decisions impact Iowa students across the state? Meeting face-to-face and sharing your district’s story can be more impactful than you realize. Legislators share stories they hear from constituents just like you—stories about crumbling infrastructure, leaking roofs, unsafe ventilation, outdated technology and more. Invite your legislator into your school and show them your need for upgraded facilities or program improvements. A “See for Yourself” tour can also show what you have done with past funding to sustain and enhance your school buildings and efforts to upgrade technology to best meet student needs.

**Tips When Meeting with Your Legislator:**

1. Know where your legislator stands on the issue.
2. Learn about the impact of a specific program and what it means to your district.
3. Invite a student or community partner to help lead the tour to explain a program and what it has meant for the student and community.
4. Say thank you. If your legislator voted for legislation that helped out your district, let them know. Legislators love to see the positive impact of their work.

**Community Engagement**

As a school board member, you are a community leader. You have a unique position to lead the dialogue about your local school district’s successes as well as challenges. It is important to make sure that not only community members are engaged, but that community organizations are aware and engaged in advocating for your district’s behalf. Other community leaders such as city council members, board of supervisors and chamber of commerce members can play crucial roles in helping to expand your advocacy base. Here are a few steps you can take to help engage your community:

**Know Your Why**

- Before beginning outreach efforts, you should be able to explain to the public why public education is important and why they should contact their legislators. If you are unable to articulate why people should care, it’s unlikely you will be able to convince them to be on your side.

- Be prepared for criticisms about public education. Reach out and listen to what people are hearing about your school and public education in general. Be ready to tell people four or five success stories from your district.
Did You Know?

The Congressional Management Foundation did a survey of what advocacy strategies have the most influence on legislators as they consider legislation. Those polled were congressional staffers (chiefs of staff, legislative directors, etc.) from the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, but these answers are easily applied to state legislators.

- 98% said that in-person meetings with constituents are very important or somewhat important to understanding constituents’ views and opinions.
- 98% said site visits are very important or somewhat important.
  - Tip: Visualize a photo opportunity
  - Tip: Ask yourself, does it help promote a legislative goal?
- 95% said receiving personalized messages from constituents are very important or somewhat important in understanding constituents’ views and opinions.
- 91% suggest providing information about the local impact of legislation as a way to improve a constituents’ message.
- 85% reported a preference for visual materials (maps, charts, infographics) to show state or district impact.

Source: Adapted with permission from a Congressional Management Foundation Webinar, 2017.

As you can see from these survey results, advocating from personal experience makes the most impact with legislators. Let legislators know how a proposed bill will affect your school district and your constituents (who are also their constituents). Also, sending legislators a personal email or note lets them know this is an important issue to you. Simply signing a form letter does not have as much impact as a personalized note. These are just a few things to remember as you advocate for your district.

Build Coalitions

- Utilize your contacts and groups already supporting public education such as your parent teacher organization (PTO) or school improvement advisory committee (SIAC) to help spread the word. Build small successes to show other groups and organizations that your message resonates.
- Engage with civic organizations within your community, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary and Farm Bureau. Ask to be a speaker at their meeting and discuss the issues facing your district and how they can help. Tailor your message to that organization’s priorities and goals.
- Start a Public Education Network consisting of education and business leaders, as well as supportive citizens. Hold business roundtables with legislators or partner with another business or organization to host a town forum during election season.
Traditional and Social Media

Social media seems to have taken the place of a phone call or written letter as favorite methods of contact. More and more legislators turn to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to communicate with their constituents and distribute information quickly. While social media may have taken the place of certain forms of communication, working through your local, state or national media can help get your message to your legislator and deliver it to people who may not be engaged on social media.

Consider these tips when working with traditional and social media:

The Digital Age

• Create a social media account. If you already have one, think about what strategies you are implementing to engage more users. Who are you following? What content are you pushing out? When are you posting? A school district recently stated that they post the majority of their items during drop-off and pick-up, while parents are waiting for their kids.

• Most Iowa legislators have a Twitter or Facebook account. Follow them on their social media pages and tag them so they receive a notification and can view your social media post.

Oldies but Goodies

• There still is something to be said about reading the opinion section of a newspaper. Ask supporters to write letters to the editor or opinion editorials highlighting the successes of your school district and work still yet to be completed.

• Prepare your supporters to speak with the media (television/newspaper/radio) on current events happening in education. Did the legislature recently pass an important piece of legislation? Prepare some community supporters so they are ready to give an interview about how it will impact the district.
RESOURCES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

IASB Issue Toolkits (www.ia-sb.org/issuetoolkits)
IASB has developed toolkits to help you advocate on several issues, including Supplemental State Aid, Transportation Funding, Educational Savings Accounts and more. These toolkits include background information, financial impact data, sample letters to the editor and sample emails to legislators, infographics to help supporters understand specific education issues, and more.

You can also check out the Financial Tools page to access district-specific data to help strengthen your case while speaking with legislators.

IASB Legislator Look-Up Tool (www.ia-sb.org/advocacy)
IASB offers the easy-to-use Legislator Look-Up Tool to assist you in communicating with your legislators. This directory makes it easy to find your legislator, learn about their background and download contact information. You can also search for your legislator by school district.

The tool also includes lists of current members of both the Education and Ways and Means Committees from each chamber. Even if your legislator is not a member of one of these committees, they can still be effective advocates for public education. It never hurts to have an additional supporting voice in the legislature.

As always, please feel free to contact your IASB Government Relations team if you have any questions or need additional guidance on any of your advocacy efforts. We are here to help!

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Committee Assignments

House Committee on Education

- **Wes Breckenridge** (D, Newton)
- **Timi Brown-Powers** (D, Waterloo)
- **Jim Carlin** (R, Sioux City)
- **Cecil Dolecheck** (R, Mount Ayr)
- **Joel Fry** (R, Osceola)
- **Ruth Ann Gaines** (D, Des Moines)
- **Tedd Gassman** (R, Scarville)
- **Kristi Hager** (R, Waukon)
- **Mary Ann Hanusa** (R, Council Bluffs)
- **Megan Jones** (R, Sioux Rapids)
- **Kevin Koester** (R, Ankeny)
- **Mary Mascher** (D, Iowa City)
- **Norlin Mommsen** (R, DeWitt)
- **Tom Moore** (R, Griswold)
- **Amy Nielsen** (D, North Liberty)
- **Sandy Salmon** (R, Janesville)
- **Ras Smith** (D, Waterloo)
- **Art Staed** (D, Cedar Rapids)
- **Skyler Wheeler** (R, Orange City)

**Walt Rogers**  
(R, Cedar Falls), Chair

**Sharon S. Steckman**  
(D, Mason City), Ranking Member

House Committee on Ways and Means

- **Chip Baltimore** (R, Boone)
- **Liz Bennett** (D, Cedar Rapids)
- **Michael Bergan** (R, Dorchester)
- **Jim Carlin** (R, Sioux City)
- **Peter Cownie** (R, West Des Moines)
- **John Forbes** (D, Urbandale)
- **Mary Gaskill** (D, Ottumwa)
- **Steven Holt** (R, Denison)
- **Charles Isenhart** (D, Dubuque)
- **Bobby Kaufmann** (R, Wilton)
- **Jerry A. Kearns** (D, Keokuk)
- **Monica Kurth** (D, Davenport)
- **Dave Maxwell** (R, Gibson)
- **Charlie McConkey** (D, Council Bluffs)
- **Gary Molhr** (R, Bettendorf)
- **Zach Nunn** (R, Bondurant)
- **Dawn E. Pettengill** (R, Mount Auburn)
- **Todd Prichard** (D, Charles City)
- **Ken Rizer** (R, Cedar Rapids)
- **David Sieck** (R, Glenwood)
- **Matt W. Windschitl** (R, Missouri Valley)
- **Mary Lynn Wolfe** (D, Clinton)

**Guy Vander Linden**  
(R, Oskaloosa), Chair

**Jane Bloomingdale**  
(R, Northwood), Vice Chair

**Dave Jacoby**  
(D, Coralville), Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Education

Amy Sinclair  
(R, Allerton), Chair

Jeff Edler  
(R, State Center), Vice Chair

Herman C. Quirmbach  
(D, Ames), Ranking Member

Jerry Behn  
(R, Boone)
Tod R. Bowman  
(D, Maquoketa)
Mark Chelgren  
(R, Ottumwa)
Jeff Danielson  
(D, Waterloo)
Robert E. Dvorsky  
(D, Coralville)
Thomas A. Greene  
(R, Burlington)

Rita Hart  
(D, Wheatland)
Craig Johnson  
(R, Independence)
Tim Kraayenbrink  
(R, Fort Dodge)
Mark S. Lofgren  
(R, Muscatine)
Liz Mathis  
(D, Cedar Rapids)
Ken Rozenboom  
(R, Oskaloosa)

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Randy Feenstra  
(R, Hull), Chair

Jerry Behn  
(R, Boone), Vice Chair

Pam Jochum  
(D, Dubuque), Ranking Member

Bill Anderson  
(R, Pierson)
Joe Bolkcom  
(D, Iowa City)
Michael Breitbach  
(R, Strawberry Point)
Waylon Brown  
(R, St. Ansgar)
Dan Dawson  
(R, Council Bluffs)
William A. Dotzler Jr.  
(D, Waterloo)

Jeff Edler  
(R, State Center)
Matt McCoy  
(D, Des Moines)
Janet Petersen  
(D, Des Moines)
Herman C. Quirmbach  
(D, Ames)
Jason Schultz  
(R, Schleswig)
Roby Smith  
(R, Davenport)