



# A sample two-year advocacy strategy

## Importance of Grassroots Advocacy

The importance of advocacy and grassroots advocacy is a central component of IASB. To have a real impact on the policy decisions made in Des Moines, advocacy must become a habit. The key to effective advocacy is to build relationships, educate, and then activate those stakeholders in order to make a positive influence on community and business leaders and policy makers.

Effective advocacy for education is a year-round job. It helps to create awareness and encourages action from those in the community. It is too late to wait until the legislative session starts to speak to your legislator and there is a crisis at the Capitol or funding for education programs is on the chopping block. You must work throughout the year to develop and nurture relationships with parents, businesses, community and higher education leaders, and local organizations as well as your legislators. Generally, that requires adopting a legislative advocacy policy for your school district, AEA or community college that states your commitment to advocacy for education. We need every board member and parent to help advocate for public education, ensuring we have the tools and resources necessary to educate our students in a global economy.

## Important questions to ask when developing your advocacy plan

### 1. What do you want to accomplish?

- Organize your board's thoughts and key points. It is best to identify your top four priorities that you want highlighted for the legislative session.

### 2. Who can best deliver your message?

- Do you have a previous relationship with this person? Has a board member contributed to a legislator? Ask your fellow board members if they have a relationship with your legislators.

### 3. What do legislators need to hear?

- How can you make this information personal to the individual or organization? Make your information and story relevant to those that are hearing it.
- Always give factual data. The quickest way to lose credibility is to provide false data.
- Your message carries weight. You are not a hired lobbyist and you are on the front lines of these issues

#### 4. How do we begin?

- Call or email the individual or organization you want to meet with and discuss your priorities.
- Try and cut through the hundreds of emails they receive by writing a hand written letter. This shows you care and they don't receive many hand written notes.
- Let them know of the successes of your district and how they can best help you.

#### 5. After the meeting: what's next?

- Follow-up with a hand written note thanking them for their time.
- Stay in regular contact and if new information becomes available let your legislator know about it. Legislators love to know what is going on in their district (it is their job).

### Developing your advocacy plan:

The following calendar outlines specific activities your board should engage in throughout the year to build relationships and advocate for district needs at the state level. Suggested activities are listed on the left-hand side of the table. You board should discuss this document and use the right-hand side of the table to outline board assignments. An example has been provided below:

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| <p><b>January to May, annually</b></p> <p><b>Stay in contact with your legislators</b></p> <p>Call legislators to advocate on priority issues. House switchboard: (515) 281-3221; Senate switchboard: (515) 281-3371. Get closer to your legislators by attending local legislative coffees and forums in their home towns on the weekend. Find locations and dates in the <a href="#">Advocacy Center on the Legislative Forums page</a>.</p> | <p><b>Board assignments and advocacy actions:</b></p> <p>-Board President will call our State Senator about legislative priorities.</p> <p>- Board Vice President will call State House Representatives about legislative priorities</p> <p>- Board Member Smith will attend State Senator legislative coffee on Saturday mornings.</p> <p>- Board Secretary will provide list of legislative forums in our area.</p> |
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| <p><b>January, annually</b></p> <p><b>Adopt a legislative program plan</b></p> <p>The plan provides direction to get involved in advocacy at the state level. It identifies specific board activities to assure effective legislative advocacy. Consider your superintendent's responsibilities to supporting advocacy. Ask what supports and assistance your superintendent needs in meeting your advocacy expectations.</p>   | <p><b>Board assignments and advocacy actions:</b></p> |
| <p><b>January to April, annually</b></p> <p><b>Sign up for and read IASB's Advocacy in Action newsletter</b></p> <p>Make sure you're signed up for IASB's Legislative Advocacy in Action and watch for our Action Alerts. Also check IASB's Web site regularly for daily updates, bill tracking and Action Alerts.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>January to May, annually</b></p> <p><b>Stay in contact with your legislators</b></p> <p>Call legislators to advocate on priority issues. House switchboard: (515) 281-3221; Senate switchboard: (515) 281-3371. Get closer to your legislators by attending local legislative coffees and forums in their home towns on the weekend. Find locations and dates in the <a href="#">Advocacy Center on the Legislative Forums page</a>.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>January, odd-numbered years</b></p> <p><b>The first session of the next two-year General Session begins</b></p> <p>The legislature is under way and you're ready! Because of your work over the past year, you know your legislators and they know you. They trust your judgment and will rely on you for information and direction. New legislators have already been briefed on your issues and look forward to working with you. Send them your contact information in a welcome message to the Capitol.</p> |   |

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| <p><b>January, annually</b></p> <p><b>Attend the IASB Day on the Hill</b> for the opportunity to learn advocacy tips and talk to your legislators about supplemental state aid and other IASB priority issues.</p>  | <p><b>Board assignments and advocacy actions:</b></p> |
| <p><b>May to August, annually</b></p> <p><b>Complete IASB's Call for Legislative Priorities Survey</b></p> <p>Spend time at your May, June, July or early August board meetings discussing resolutions and voting on your districts priorities for the upcoming legislative session.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>May, annually</b></p> <p><b>Conduct a school visit</b></p> <p>Invite legislative candidates to tour schools and campuses. Show off state-funded programs in action or conversely, show places and programs that desperately need state help and aren't getting it. Arrange to have other board members, teachers, administrators, parents or students on hand to tell their stories. Or invite legislators to recognize excellence at awards ceremonies and celebrations.</p> |   |
| <p><b>May, annually</b></p> <p><b>Send a follow-up letter</b></p> <p>Follow up on the legislator's visit within two days with a thank you letter to reinforce issues raised in the visit. Send a copy of the letter to your legislator and/or legislative candidate.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>May, annually</b></p> <p><b>Advocate as session closes</b></p> <p>Contact the governor regarding any requested veto actions. Find ways to publicly thank supportive legislators: write a letter to the editor, acknowledge them at your board table, etc.</p>   |   |

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| <p><b>May, even-numbered years</b></p> <p><b>Sponsor a town meeting or debate</b></p> <p>Join with other districts in your area, or ask your AEA, to sponsor a town meeting or debate with legislative candidates facing off in the primary. Invite the public and local news media to hear the candidates share their views on important education issues.</p>                                     | <p><b>Board assignments and advocacy actions:</b></p> |
| <p><b>June, annually</b></p> <p><b>Watch for IASB Legislative Summary</b></p> <p>This summary puts a bow on the legislative session giving you an in-depth review of legislation that was enacted and what it means for your district.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>Late June, even-numbered years</b></p> <p><b>Contact primary winners</b></p> <p>Contact winners of the primary election to offer congratulations and provide additional information as education issues emerge.</p>   |   |
| <p><b>August, annually</b></p> <p><b>Invite legislators to your board meeting</b></p> <p>Invite your legislators to attend your board meeting and brief you on their work affecting your schools. Thank them for voting in support of education issues and ask why they voted against a certain issue. Give specific examples of how their decisions actually impact your schools and programs.</p> |   |
| <p><b>September, annually</b></p> <p><b>Review school advocate job description</b></p> <p>Back-to-school is a great time to reinforce advocacy activities. Review the school advocate job description and commit to advocacy learning. Visit the IASB Advocacy Center on the IASB website; see the Advocacy 101 page for a <a href="#">Sample School Board Advocate Job Description</a>.</p>        |   |

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| <p><b>September, annually</b></p> <p><b>Invite legislators: Back-to-school event</b></p> <p>Back-to-school nights are perfect opportunities to reach public education supporters. Arrange for your legislator and/or legislative candidates to speak at a back-to-school event. Your legislator will be grateful to you for connecting them with constituents. These are goodwill non-partisan chances for you to cement the tie with your legislator.</p>              | <p><b>Board assignments and advocacy actions:</b></p> |
| <p><b>Early October, even-numbered years</b></p> <p><b>Sponsor a town meeting or debate</b></p> <p>Join with other districts in your area to sponsor a town meeting or debate with legislative candidates facing off in the November general election. Invite the public and local news media to hear the candidates share their views on important education issues. Share IASB's Legislative Beliefs and Priorities with your legislators/legislative candidates.</p> |   |
| <p><b>October, even-numbered years</b></p> <p><b>“Pop the question” at a forum</b></p> <p>Before the November general election, legislative candidates will participate in a number of debates and joint appearances. Go with the intention of "popping the question" about one critical education issue. This will keep education on their radar screen as an important issue to their constituents.</p>   |   |
| <p><b>November, annually</b></p> <p><b>Attend the IASB Annual Delegate Assembly and Convention</b></p> <p>Send a delegate from your district to determine IASB’s platform and priorities. Attend IASB’s Annual Convention to hone your advocacy skills. Enhance your own professional development and effectiveness as a board member. Send a note to your legislators about priority issues for the next session.</p>  |   |

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| <p><b>November, annually</b></p> <p><b>Educate your public and media</b></p> <p>Meet with local press about key issues. Review IASB position statements for background and key messages. Review the impact on your district students and constituents. Share information with the local media about school board priorities and the upcoming session. Send a press release to local media about your district's participation in IASB's Delegate Assembly.</p> | <p><b>Board assignments and advocacy actions:</b></p> |
| <p><b>November, even-numbered years</b></p> <p><b>Contact General Election winners</b></p> <p>Contact winners of the general election to offer additional information on education issues as their needs arise.</p>  |   |