

# IASB'S GUIDE TO THE LEGISLATIVE INTERIM

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# INTRODUCTION



The 2021 Legislative Session was a tumultuous year, with many ups and downs and twists and turns, resulting in a few hard-fought wins for public education. In a nutshell, your advocacy helped defeat vouchers, increase flexibility for board and district operations, expand access to mental health services, strengthen ELL weighting, derail efforts to eliminate a voter-approved levy, defeat unfunded mandate bills, and secure funds for preschool enrollment.

Looking ahead to 2022, there are many challenges we didn't anticipate before the pandemic. These challenges are outlined in the key legislative issues on pp. 2–3. This is where your advocacy becomes more important than ever, just as it did in 2021. We need your advocacy and strong relationships with legislators to establish board members as the go-to source of information for public schools.

Once session starts, your legislators should have already heard from you and know you on a first-name basis.

That's because the legislative interim (summer and fall) is the ideal time for you to connect and deepen these important relationships because many important decisions are made on public policy during these months. As a locally elected school board member, you can influence public policy and make a difference for your schools and students. Remember, advocacy is a year-long process. It takes time and effort but it's worthwhile and important.

This advocacy guide includes an in-depth look at upcoming issues for the 2022 legislative session, talking points and tips for you to use with legislators, and IASB resources that will help you advocate on behalf of your district.



# KEY LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

## Sufficient and Equitable School Funding

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the already difficult funding position of many districts across the state. The federal government appropriated millions of dollars for K-12 education but that funding was distributed based on a district's Title I count, rather than certified enrollment.

The model caused inequities in the distribution of this important funding. Some districts received as little as \$100 per pupil, while others received more than \$4,000 per pupil. But no matter the amount of funding, each district faced the same challenges when ensuring the school environment was safe for students.



**ASK:** Thank your legislators for their support of public education. Ask that future money be sufficient and distributed equitably to each school district. Remind legislators that the federal money that has been distributed to schools is one-time in nature and districts will be working for several years to help students recover from learning loss experienced during the pandemic.

## Dropout Prevention

This issue has become a priority for many districts, especially given the effects of closing schools and online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The dropout prevention fund is used to keep students in school and encourage them to complete high school. Districts can use the funds for professional development, salary and benefits for staff who work with at-risk students, and other needs to keep students in school. In 2013, legislation passed that prohibited schools from spending above 5% of their regular program cost on dropout prevention. Districts were frozen at the percentage they were spending at the time of the change, which means many districts are spending below the 5% cap resulting in inequities for students.



Districts that have met the cap cannot use funds that could keep more students in school. Now is time for the legislature to fix this inequity. IASB has worked with legislators over the last two years to introduce legislation that allows these districts frozen below the 5% cap to request additional funds up to the 5% maximum.

**ASK:** If your district is capped below the 5% threshold, talk to your legislators about this inequity and explain how these funds would benefit students. The pandemic has only increased the need for additional dropout prevention funding. Ask them to support efforts to allow districts more resources for dropout prevention and at-risk students.



# KEY LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

## Local Control

IASB has advocated for local control and keeping that decision-making authority with our locally elected school boards. Over the years education advocates have defeated several attempts to limit this control. Unfortunately, some initiatives that weren't defeated removed local board authority. Examples include the mandatory school start date and prohibiting schools from requiring masks.



It is critical that decision making and the need to be responsive to the community is kept at the local level, in the capable hands of school boards.

**ASK:** Remind your legislators that school boards are locally elected officials and have accountability and responsibility to their constituents. Talk about how local decision making is in the best interest of your students. Explain the process your board undergoes to make complex decisions and how you balance both sides of the argument.



# GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT

Relationship building is one of the most important aspects of advocacy. The legislative interim is a terrific opportunity to build relationships with legislators and candidates running for political office. As a school board member, you can be a political influencer and share your knowledge and expertise.

Check out the tips below to help you engage legislators by sharing your district's success stories as well as challenges and needs.



## Effective Legislator Meetings

Legislators will be eager to meet with you in person after a year of primarily virtual events. Invite your legislators on a school tour and talk to them about the needs of your students and district. Show them facility projects or walk them through the limitations of stringent rules and the negative effect on innovation and flexibility. Be sure to thank them for any votes they took that benefited your district. Legislators want to hear from their constituents so make your voice heard!

### Tips When Meeting (Virtually) With Your Legislator:

1. Be clear on your goal.
2. Stay on message and provide clear, concise arguments. Give your legislator a one-page document outlining your issues.
3. Know where your legislator stands on the issue. If you are unsure, ask!
4. Relay the impact of a specific program or bill to your legislator. Tell them how it could affect their constituents.
5. Follow up the meeting with a personal thank you. If your legislator voted for legislation that helped your district, let them know.

Remember, many groups are vying for your legislator's time and attention. They are pulled in many different directions (sometimes with opposing views on education) so it is important they see firsthand the great work public schools are doing.

# GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT

## Community Engagement

As a school board member, you are a community leader. You are in a unique position to lead the dialogue about your school district's successes as well as challenges. It is important to make sure that your community members and organizations are aware and engaged in advocating on your district's behalf. Other community leaders such as elected officials, civic organizations, and business leaders can be great advocates for a school district. They all have a vital interest in seeing strong public schools. As you begin your outreach, here are a few things to remember:



### 1. Know Your Why:

- a. Before making any outreach, you should be able to explain to the community leaders why public education is important and why they should contact their legislators. If you are unable to articulate why people should care, you will not convince them to be on your side.
- b. Be prepared for opposition to your ask. You should have information to counter inaccurate information and provide them specifics to support your position.

### 2. Build Coalitions:

- a. 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.
- b. Engage with civic organizations within your community, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary and Farm Bureau. Ask to be a speaker at their meetings and discuss the issues facing your district and how they can help. Tailor your message to that organization's priorities and goals.
- c. Look at lobbyist registrations for bills you are interested in on the legislature's website. IASB can help find the bill number and a list of lobbyist declarations. This will give you insight into who supported, remained neutral, and opposed the bill. Once you have that information, reach out to that organization or to the organization's local representative and talk to them about the bill.



# GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT

## Media Engagement

Legislators use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate with 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 social media and traditional media:



## Social Media

- Utilize social media. In today's fast paced world, many people are informed on issues through social media. What strategies are you implementing to engage more users? Who are you following? What content are you pushing? When are you posting?
- Follow your legislators on social media. Most Iowa legislators have a Twitter or Facebook account. Follow them on their social media pages and tag them in your post so they receive a notification and can view and share your social media post.
- Promote your school with photos of legislator tours. When your legislator engages with you or students, be sure to take a photo of that interaction. Legislators will likely retweet or share that on their social media pages. Prior to posting your photos, have your communications director check the photos to ensure legal compliance.

## Print and Broadcast Media

- Line up supporters to write letters to the editor or opinion editorials highlighting the successes of the 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](http://www.ia-sb.org/issuetoolkits)

IASB has [toolkits](#) to help you advocate for several issues, including Supplemental State Aid, Transportation Funding, Dropout Prevention/At-Risk, Educational Savings Accounts and more. These toolkits include background information, fiscal impact data, sample letters to the editor, 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](http://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 every committee in both chambers. Even if your legislator is not a member of the Education Committee, 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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