



Board members as political and community advocates

Discussion questions

Advocacy is simply communicating on behalf of public education with policy makers who appropriate resources that affect district operations. Informing and persuading in favor of positions that benefit public education, lifelong learning, excellence and equity is an important responsibility of district and board leadership.

What specific questions can the board use to reflect on its advocacy practices and are there recommended action steps that could start a board member on the path of effective advocacy? How does advocacy impact student achievement?

Advocacy discussion questions

As a board of education ...

- How do we reach out to local legislative agencies?
- How are we involving ourselves with and supporting the Ohio School Boards Association statewide advocacy program?
- How do we participate in the National School Boards Associations national legislative advocacy efforts?
- How do we encourage, support and acknowledge legislative support for the district's vision, mission and goals?
- How do we respond to proposals at the state level when we don't see alignment with student achievement goals?
- How do we help legislators know how their actions impact or align with the district's educational needs and implementation plan?

References

McKay, A. and Newcombe, J. (2002). *Aligning Resources for Student Achievement*. Alexandria: National School Boards Association, pp.22-23.





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Action steps

Having succeeded in the political process, board members are elected officials with supporters and name recognition. As such, a board member is regarded as a person with clout and afforded opportunities to meet with other public officials because of the respect granted the position. Conversely, other elected representatives look to board members as a source of information about the school system. Below are recommended action steps that could start a board member on the path of effective advocacy.

Advocacy action steps

Actions for individual board members

- Introduce yourself to your elected representatives by phone, email or letter and request a personal meeting. Present yourself as concerned constituent, fellow elected official and information source on education.
- Write a guest column or send a letter to the editor to local newspapers.
- Sign up to receive communications from elected officials. Listen to their messages and provide information and reaction to support or challenge what they say.
- Become a member of *Kids PAC*, a OSBA's political action committee that gives board members the opportunity to belong to a PAC whose membership is aware of the problems facing boards of education and whose goals are aimed at dealing with those issues. Learn more at www.kidspac.org.
- Respond to OSBA "Call to Action eAlerts." When necessary, the OSBA Division of Legislative Services requests that OSBA members contact certain legislators, state board members or other policymakers to address critical issues impacting public education. The OSBA legislative division also asks for member feedback as it prepares testimony for or against legislation and advocates a position in interested-party meetings.
- Attend OSBA seminars, meetings and webinars offered by the OSBA Division of Legislative Services.

Actions for local boards of education

- At the January organization meeting, appoint one member of your board of education to serve as its district legislative liaison. Legislative liaisons are an important part of OSBA's legislative advocacy program.
- Include a regular item on your board meeting agenda to review current state and federal issues and discuss their impact on the district and the board's response.
- Encourage formal and informal public input, public comments at board meetings, hearings and community listening events at schools and other locations in your district.
- Consider joint meetings with other districts or organizations with similar goals, including other education groups, local government, businesses, child and family services, to review district positions, learn about other interests and seek common goals and strategies.
- Become involved in or create your own grassroots initiative. Familiarize yourself with OSBA's publication "Effective Advocacy for School Leaders" (<http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/83844>), which includes nine steps and detailed action items to help school board members and administrators become strong advocates for their school districts.
- Participate in the OSBA Legislative Platform resolution process. The OSBA Legislative Platform (<http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/platform>) reflects the legislative goals and beliefs adopted by members and it conveys OSBA's positions on issues to legislators, policymakers, the public and the media. It is used to guide the association's advocacy efforts.

