

WASBO Fall Conference 2022

Building Relationships with your Legislators

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Goal of the Legislative Advocacy Series

Strengthen the ability of all superintendents to influence their legislators and their communities in support of enhanced educational opportunities for all Wisconsin school children.



SAA Legislative Advocacy Series

The Modules Planned for the Series

- Foundations in Advocacy
- First Things First – Getting Started in Advocacy
- The Legislative and State Budget Processes
- **Building Relationships with Your Legislators**
- State Budget Advocacy
- Influencing Your Community
- Influencing the Media
- Investing in Influence – SAA PAC Contributions



Today's Agenda

- **Foundations in Advocacy. What is the SAA? Why Collective Action?**
- **Getting Started in Advocacy.**
- **Building/Maintaining a Solid Working Relationship With Your Legislator.**
- **What Must We Do in This Challenging Environment?**



What is the SAA?

- SAA exists for one reason – Government Relations.
- Five Associations – AWSA, WASBO, WASDA, WASPA, WCASS.
- A stronger, more unified political voice to better serve kids.
- That's five associations speaking with one voice on behalf of Wisconsin school children.



SAA History and Mission

- Founded in 1991 when AWSA and WASDA combined advocacy efforts.
- WASBO (1992) and WCASS (1994) joined shortly thereafter.
- Incorporated as a 501(c)(4) in 2016.
- WASPA became the fifth SAA association in 2018.
- SAA Mission: *To represent the interests of Wisconsin school children.*



Respective Roles – Superintendent and SAA

- Superintendent represents the interests of local students, parents and community.
- Advocating for the district's students is a critical part of the superintendent's job.
- SAA represents the collective interest of all SAA members statewide.
- SAA also advocates for the long-term interests of public education in Wisconsin.
- Historically, SAA members have strongly supported collective action in advocacy and policy development.



SAA Core Advocacy Principles

- **ALL MEANS ALL!** Every child, every day. No matter their zip code. No matter their educational needs.
- **We don't stand for anything that is wrong for students.**
- **Collective action in advocacy and policy development.** Flows naturally from our support for all children.



Why Collective Action?

- Historically, the party in power has sought to divide the SAA. Why?
- A divided SAA is a weaker SAA.
- By extension, divided K-12 groups = weaker advocacy for public schools.
- Collective action has proven to generate the best results for all children.



Getting Started in Advocacy

Share your thoughts on the following:

- **In your opinion, what are the barriers that keep superintendents from becoming involved in advocacy with their legislators?**



Key Points to Remember

- **Effective advocacy requires district administrative team coordination, with the leadership of the superintendent.**
- **Many new/novice members find legislative advocacy intimidating.**
- **Many also believe they don't know how to be effective advocates.**
- **Remember, you are the expert on education issues, not your legislator.**
- **We will have lots of new legislators following the 2022 elections.**
- **It is important to get on your new legislator's radar early.**



“Breaking the Ice”

- Working with your superintendent and administrative team you may want to consider engaging in the following:
 - Call to congratulate your legislator on their election victory.
 - You may want to connect with candidates even before the election.
 - Meet for coffee, Zoom meeting, phone conversation, or in-district office hours.
 - Lean on regional colleagues, administrative team members for guidance.
 - Perhaps a group meeting with regional colleagues at first.



First Meeting Discussion Topics

Share your thoughts on the following:

- What are some great discussion topics for your first meeting between your administrative team and legislator(s)? What topics might you steer clear of initially?
- It is critically important that the superintendent and the administrative team strategically plan their respective roles in the first and subsequent meetings with legislator(s).



Key Points to Remember

- **Administrative team coordination is critically important.**
- **Get to know your legislator - why did they choose to run for public office?**
- **“What issues do you want to focus on this session?”**
- **Share your background. Find common connections.**
- **Share key information on your district, your student population.**
- **Don’t be in a hurry to discuss school finance. Your legislator may raise it.**
- **Stay informed on legislative and budget issues. It builds credibility.**



More Tips on Relationship-Building

- Focus with your district team on the legislator(s) that represent your school district.
- Have student-centered conversations that communicate the unique needs of your student population and the opportunities you provide to them.
- Encourage legislators to visit or volunteer at their local schools. It is critically important for legislators to see what learning looks like today.
- Your district team can take pictures to promote your legislators meeting with students and constituents.
- Say thank you to your legislator for small wins, including visits, votes and volunteering.
- Focus on building a long-term relationship. It is not a race.



More Tips on Relationship-Building

- Invite your legislator to visit or volunteer at your schools.
- During session legislators are normally in the district Mondays and Fridays.
- Take pictures of your legislators meeting with students and constituents.
- Say thank you to your legislator for small wins, including votes, visits and volunteering.



Maintaining a Solid Relationship

- Be persistent in communicating with your legislator. Don't let them lose track of issues critically important to your district.
- Keep the communication cycle working. Even if your legislator does not support your position on one issue . . . There WILL be other issues..
- Advocacy is about relationship building which is an ongoing process. Building/maintaining a solid relationship takes work.



Holding Legislators Accountable

- Accountability is an important part of any relationship.
- Holding your legislators accountable for their positions/votes is challenging.
- How you do so is dependent on the relationship you have with your legislators.

How can you effectively hold your legislators accountable?



A Deteriorating Political Environment

- We used to depend on a handful of moderate GOP senators.
- With multiple retirements, our firewall is essentially gone.
- This may be the most difficult environment for public education ever in Wisconsin.
- It is unlikely to improve following the 2022 elections.
- In fact, it may get worse.



A Deteriorating Political Environment

- Privatization advocates are the 800 lb. gorilla of education politics. A formidable array of pro-voucher organizations have aligned against public education in Wisconsin.
- Last session, public school children were used as political footballs like I have never seen before.
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What Must We Do?

- The next legislative session begins in a few months. It is a critical session for public education and the children we serve.
- Identify how we can effectively encourage for WASDA members to engage in legislative advocacy.
- The quality of our relationships with our legislators and our advocacy efforts will determine our success inside the Capitol.
- To the extent that you are influential in your community, you are influential to your legislators.
- We have a lot of work to do.

