



New Jersey School Boards Association

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Advocacy “101”

Members of the NJ Legislature value clear, concise information from school board members. Local board of education members are in a good position to know what proposed legislation on the State and federal level will or will not work in public schools.

Here are some tips on effectively communicating with legislators, how to stay informed on timely issues, and ways to get more involved in NJSBA’s advocacy efforts...

1. Get to know your local legislators.

- Personal relationships with legislators help ensure your voice is heard.
- Find Your Legislator: <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/districts/municipalities.asp>
- Contact Your Legislator: <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/members/legsearch.asp>

2. Keep all lines of communication open.

- Face-to-face meetings are particularly valuable in developing relationships.
- Email, written letters, and phone calls work too. Avoid form letters.
- Create opportunities for interaction with legislators (i.e., school functions).

3. A few meeting scheduling tips...

- Be clear about meeting topic and number of attendees. Don’t be disingenuous.
- For legislator meetings, reach out well in advance.
- Make clear who you are (registered voter, BOE member, etc.) and who you represent.

4. Develop relationships with legislative staff too.

- Don’t object to meeting with or talking to key staff. They can be very informed, helpful, and generally more accessible. And they serve as your direct link to their boss.
- Treat them as you would a legislator. Understand who they are and what they do.
- Legislative Staffers: Chief of Staff, Legislative Director, Scheduler, Director of Constituent Services.

5. Be brief and get to the point.

- Focus on a specific issue (i.e., pending bill) and succinctly explain your position.
- “Tame” the issue and know their saturation point.
- Propose a solution to the problem. Don’t just complain and expect a fix.
- Don’t just speak...listen!

6. Use your “dual role” to your advantage.

- You’re not only school board members; you’re also constituents...who vote!
- Legislators *will* listen to you...you just have to speak up.

7. Be a consistent, reliable source of information.

- Don't assume legislators know everything...or anything!
- Stick to the facts. And provide real-world examples of how specific legislation/policies would impact students and schools.
- Follow up and follow through on any requests for information.
- Keep them "in the loop" and give them confidence that they can rely on you in the future.

8. Stay informed and be prepared.

- Do your homework and understand both sides of an issue.
- NJSBA Resources: www.njsba.org, (e.g., *School Board Notes*, *Advocacy* webpage)
- Government:
 - Governor: www.nj.gov/governor
 - NJ Legislature: www.njleg.state.nj.us
 - NJ Department of Education: www.state.nj.us/education
 - NJ State Board of Education: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sboe/>
- Other Educational Organizations: NJEA, NJPSA, NJASA, NSBA
- News: NJSBA Daily Clips, NJ Spotlight, NJ.com, InsiderNJ, POLITICO

9. Manage expectations – be realistic and patient.

- Stay positive. Don't be negative, hostile, defensive, or aggressive.
- Regardless of the result, don't burn bridges. You may get a better outcome next time.
- Find a "middle ground" and be open to compromise.
- Always say "Thank You". Be persistent, but respectful.

10. Know and understand the legislative process...and get involved!

- Utilize the expertise of NJSBA staff.
- Send correspondence when and where it is most effective. This often depends on the time of year or the status of a particular bill.
- The lawmaking process: <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/legprocess.asp>
- Join in NJSBA Advocacy efforts
 - Join NJSBA's Legislative Committee
 - Take action when "Advocacy Alerts" are issued
 - Adopt Sample Resolutions on specific legislation/issues
 - Annual NJSBA/NJPTA Legislative Day
 - County association advocacy-focused meetings
 - Attend Federal Relations Network in Washington, D.C.
 - Submit resolutions to NJSBA Delegate Assembly, which establishes formal NJSBA policy

➤ **THE ADVANCEMENT OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT MUST ALWAYS REMAIN THE TOP PRIORITY**

The New Jersey School Boards Association, a non-partisan federation of boards of education, provides training, advocacy and support to advance public education and promote the achievement of all students through effective governance.