



## **School Administrators Alliance**

*Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children*

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# School Administrators Alliance

## Legislative Advocacy 101

As constituents, community leaders, and educators with a keen understanding of the practice of public education, SAA members are in a strong position to engage their lawmakers on a variety of levels. Engaging directly with lawmakers allows members to shape their lawmaker's opinions and their understanding of key political issues. This kind of direct influence can have an immediate and decisive impact on the state policy that affects schools.

This legislative advocacy tool provides you with information on engaging lawmakers as . . .

### **A Constituent**

Legislators care what their local voters think and want. Lobbying can lay the ground work for shaping policy, but the real influence comes from direct SAA member contact with legislators. Whether that contact comes through an email, letter or phone call, understanding the protocol for contacting your lawmakers is key. The tools in this document will also give you information on effective letter writing and phone calls.

### **A Community Leader**

SAA members are leaders in their communities and, as such, are in a position to influence the people around them. Their role also puts them in position to build relationships with lawmakers and to lobby them effectively. The tools in this document will teach you how to build relationships with lawmakers, effectively lobby them, and engage lawmakers through a calendar of activities.

### **An Education Policy Expert**

Lawmakers seek out and rely upon the input of a "small circle of experts" in various fields to help them shape public policy. It is important for you to become one of your legislator's experts on PK-12 education issues. SAA members bring to the table an understanding of how schools operate at every level. You can provide valuable insight regarding the impact a particular idea or piece of legislation will have on schools.

## The SAA Golden Rules of Grassroots Lobbying

### **Politics Is Local and Consumer-Driven**

Help your legislator understand why your position is important to your community and to his or her constituents. Fight for your position at home, where your legislator lives, by leveraging the influence you have in your community.

## Stay Informed

Your knowledge of the issues and of the legislative process builds credibility with your legislator; and your credibility dictates your legislator's response to your concerns. Stay up-to-date on legislative issues by reading the SAA blog as well as your state and local newspapers. Also, before contacting your legislators, it is vitally important that you know and understand the SAA's positions on issues. If you have questions about certain legislative issues, please contact the SAA for information and/or clarification.

## Focus on Your Legislators

Rather than wasting time and energy contacting all legislators, concentrate on influencing your legislators. Communication from citizens residing outside their district rarely influences lawmakers. Focus your efforts where the potential for influence is greatest – your legislators.

## A Little Professionalism Goes a Long Way

Be credible, honest and trustworthy. Never threaten, lie or conceal facts. Stay calm — if you lose your cool, you lose the case. Be positive. Make your case on the merits, not by criticizing others' motives or personalities.

## There Are No Permanent Friends and No Permanent Enemies

Don't take your traditional friends for granted. Never write off a legislator just because of party affiliation or a perceived lack of interest in your issues. Don't make enemies of legislators — you may need them as friends in the future.

## Know Your Legislator's Staff

A legislator's staff is the gatekeeper to power. If you cannot talk directly with your legislator, expressing your school district's concerns to an office staffer, whom you know and who knows you, is the next best thing. Take the time to build relationships with key people on your legislator's staff.

## Stay Committed

Remember — you are the expert! Be politely persistent in pursuit of your objective. You have a compelling, energizing reason to keep fighting for the children you serve.

## Keep SAA Staff Informed

SAA members are an invaluable source of field intelligence for SAA staff. Legislators often speak more candidly with constituents than they do with lobbyists. Inform SAA staff what your legislators are saying in their districts.

## Respond to SAA Legislative Alerts

Grassroots lobbying is the real strength of the SAA. Our ability to mobilize SAA members, and community members they influence, is the backbone of our grassroots strategy. When the SAA issues a legislative alert, we need your response. Our success on important legislation depends on it.

## Contribute to SAA PAC and/or SAADirect

The SAA Political Action Committee (SAA PAC) and the SAA's conduit (SAADirect) were created to strengthen the SAA as a political organization. SAA PAC and SAADirect funds are used for campaign contributions designed to strengthen our relationships with key legislators and to influence legislation. A strong SAA PAC and SAADirect are critical to our success on legislative issues. The SAA is prohibited from using any portion of its budget to make contributions to anyone running for or holding elective office. Therefore, if we want a stronger voice in Madison to help us advocate more effectively on behalf of the children we serve, it is vital that we support SAA PAC and SAADirect.

# Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

Any lobbyist will tell you that building ongoing RELATIONSHIPS with lawmakers is one of the most important things you must do. Contact with your legislators is likely to go more smoothly as a result. Legislators are people too, and most will appreciate your interest and respond accordingly.

## Here are a few tips:

- Build these relationships, if possible, before you need to address a specific issue. You won't always be able to do that however. Work to build the relationships nonetheless.
- Be persistent in communicating. Don't let them lose track of the issues in your school district or what you want done about them. Some SAA members have found success contacting their legislators on a weekly basis (especially during session) as part of their regular schedule of work activities.
- During the session, legislators are usually in Madison on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. They are usually in their "home" districts on Monday and Friday.
- Work with your administrative team and school board members to invite legislators to school events. It will help them know your district better and associate you with your community when they hear from you again.
- Take pictures of your legislators meeting with their constituents or speaking with students in your school district. Send them a copy.
- Say thank you (letter, email, phone call) after your legislator meets with you or visits your school district. Especially thank your legislators after they have supported your position in a vote. A handwritten note is best. (You'd be surprised how few people actually thank legislators.)
- Don't stop. Keep the communication cycle working. You WILL encounter another issue on which you will want your legislator's support.