

Strategies for Effective Advocacy

As an advocate, you provide an extremely important informational service to legislators and their staff. Advocating provides legislators and their staff direct contact with their community and the opinions of their constituents. Remember: Your legislators have as much reason to see you as you have to see them. Here are some helpful suggestions for effective advocacy:

Formulate a few central points that you want to make during your meeting with the legislator, but not too many of them.

Form teams consisting of a greeter, a leader/expediter, and reporters

- The greeter is a student from the team who has been prepared ahead of time with a short speech to welcome the legislator.
- The leader/expediter is a staff person who sets the tone of the meeting. The leader establishes a rapport with the legislator. *They are friendly and courteous, and never show hostility even to an obviously unsympathetic politician.* The leader facilitates the meeting to allow the students to share their ESBOCES/Academy experiences with the legislator, and to allow the staff members to expand on the issues that ESBOCES has chosen to embrace. The leader/expediter keeps the meeting moving and can signal its change of pace, or when it's time for the meeting to end. Note: The leader/expediter does not stifle a discussion that is providing some insights even though it is off the track. They keep the conversation from meandering fruitlessly.
- The reporter is a listener. Each team should have at least one student and one staff reporter. The reporter concentrates on being perceptive and remembering as much as possible, or can take notes. They listen not only to what is being said; but also looks for what else is implied. A short, written report of the meeting should be provided to the group leader.

During the visit with a legislator:

- Get your point of view across in the fewest possible words.
- Do not be afraid to admit that you don't know an answer and never make up answers.
- Find out the answer after the visit and report back to the legislator.
- Leave on a friendly note, even if the meeting didn't go as well as you had hoped. If you have a good rapport with a legislator, ask for his or her advice or assistance in reaching out to other legislators.
- Be sure to thank the legislator for taking the time out of his or her busy schedule to meet with you even if he or she does not support your position.
- Always leave the door open for another visit.

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Things *not* to do during your visit:

- Don't argue with the legislator.
- Don't be late. Be on time and do not prolong the interview beyond the agreed-upon duration.
- Don't do all the talking. Others are there to talk as well, and you are also there to hear the legislator's views as well as to express your own.
- Don't let the legislator interview you.
- Don't attempt to extract rash promises.
- Don't negotiate with the legislator.
- Don't comment on answers, except to clarify your position where it has been misunderstood.
- Don't ask questions that are not related to your pre-established advocacy points. This is not the forum for personal agendas.

Explain Your Position

An explanation of how legislation personally affects you and your colleagues is a highly-effective form of advocacy. As a student or staff member of BOCES, describe in your own words how a particular issue affects you.

Ask for a Response

Urge your legislator to act in support or opposition to a particular issue, or to take whatever legislative action you deem necessary.

Remember:

Be Brief

Be Clear

Be Polite