Effective Advocacy: Five Steps for Sharing Your Expertise with Decision-makers

Nathan Bond and Alexander “Sandy” Pope
KDP Executive Council Members and KDP Public Policy Committee Members
Introductions

Nathan Bond

- NathanBond@txstate.edu
- KDP President
- Member KDP Public Policy Committee
- Associate Professor at Texas State University
- KDP Chapter Counselor

Sandy Pope

- pope@tc.columbia.edu
- KDP Member-at-Large
- Member of the KDP Public Policy Committee
- Doctoral Candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University
Webinar Objectives

- By participating in this webinar, you will be able to:
  - Share your expertise with decision-makers at the school, local, state, and federal levels
  - Identify ways that you can get involved in KDP’s public policy and advocacy efforts
  - Distinguish between advocacy and lobbying
  - Explain how laws are made
  - Get excited about educational advocacy!
In what are you interested?

• What is a major issue that you’re currently facing in your school, district, or state?

• Please send your response to the webinar moderator.
What is advocacy?

• *Advocates* ...

  • build relationships with others

  • plead the cause on behalf of others / are persuasive

  • give information to legislators, elected officials, and decision-makers in the hope that leaders will be influenced to support those viewpoints

  • identify problems that need to be addressed, contact legislators, and encourage them to guide the bill through the legislative process
How does advocacy differ from lobbying?

• Lobbyists are paid.

• Since teachers are governmental employees, they are prohibited by law in many states from lobbying.
Why should you advocate?

- Educators and families want to help their children, and the quality of education provided to children is helped or harmed by the political climate. Much of what happens depends on political decisions (Pillow-Price, 2009).

- You are the expert. You are knowledgeable. Most representatives do not have a background in education. They need those who know about children to inform them about innovations in the profession and possible solutions (NAEYC, 2004).

- The political process has a place in the school. Educators should model appropriate civic behavior to children. It’s an opportunity to teach about the democratic process (Engle & Ochoa, 1988).

- “If you do not speak up for children and for the field itself, someone else will speak for them” (Pillow-Price, 2009, p. 18).
Step 1: Know how decisions are made / bills become law

- The information in today’s webinar applies to the school, district, state, and federal levels.

- A bill is simply an idea that someone or a group of people would like to see become a law (Pillow-Price, 2009).
Step 2: Get acquainted with your representative

A. Do your homework **online** by reviewing their website

Political Life

Personal Life
   - Who is this person? Spouse? Children?
   - Relate this information to the issue to make a more personal presentation (Pillow-Price, 2009).

B. Do your homework **in person** by meeting your representative to introduce yourself and build relationships
   - The most effective approach to advocate is through building relationships (Pillow-Price, 2009).
   - “The key to successful advocacy with each audience is to develop a relationship based on honesty, trust, and a command of the issues” (WSSDA, 2011, p. 3).
Step 3: Study the proposed issue

- Study websites, educational magazines, and journals
  - What has been tried before?
  - What are both sides of the issue?

- Talk to others
  - Who is affected by the issue or the solution?
  - Where do your colleagues stand?

- Develop your “elevator pitch”
  - Connect it to the representative’s life
  - Connect it to your life (Make your presentation personal)
Step 4: Decide your method for advocacy

- Email, fax, or letter
- Telephone call
- Social media
- In-person meeting
Email, fax, or letter

• Send original communications instead of mass-produced ones (Caldwell, 2003).

• Communicate in a variety of ways (Pillow-Price, 2009).
  • Phone the representative to learn the preferred method of communication

• Include these parts in your one-page letter
  • Your name, address, and telephone number
  • The issue that concerns you (Why and how it affects you?)
    • Refer to the bill number
  • The action that you want the representative to take

• Other ideas to remember
  • Keep it short, focused, positive, polite, business-like
  • Avoid educational jargon
  • Proof your letter and write well
  • Don’t go overboard with your passion and zeal
Telephone Calls

• Phone calls are an effective and fast way to communicate, especially when a critical vote is coming up (WSSDA, 2011, p. 23)

• Your previous nurtured relationship with your representative will pay dividends

• Include these parts in your phone conversation
  • Ask to speak to the representative
    • Probably will speak to receptionist or aide, who is tallying constituents’ votes for and against an issue
  • Your name, address, and telephone number
  • The issue that concerns you (Why and how it affects you?)
    • Refer to the bill number
  • The action that you want the representative to take
Social Media

• Most representatives have an active social media presence

• Social media is an effective way to reach a large group of people
  • Average citizens are more likely to visit Facebook or Twitter than a specific website devoted to an issue (CSAE, 2011).
  • Information from friends and family is more trustworthy than what is presented on the news (Wilford, 2012).
  • You can create a new group or join an existing one

• Follow similar rules to email and phone contact
  • Focus on the issue
  • Include information for follow-up
    • Social media encourages two-way communication (Briones et al, 2011).
    • Let others know how they can learn more.
  • Present a measured view; social media is often viewed as reactionary and emotional (Sayre et al, 2010).
In-person Meeting

• Visit with your representative at the Capitol or in his/her home office
  • home office, town hall meetings, community functions
  • Most social calendars for representatives are on the Internet. Many of the events are free, open to the public, and provide a great opportunity for networking about a cause (Pillow-Price, 2009).
  • Consider asking them to visit your school

• Schedule an appointment and inform the office about the reason for requesting the meeting
  • Most meetings last 15 to 20 minutes

• Before the meeting
  • Dress professionally
  • Arrive on time
  • Greet the receptionist
  • Sign the guest book and include a short message about the issue
  • Ask to speak to the representative or the aide in charge of educational issues
  • Identify yourself as a constituent. Let the staff person know that you are a voter in the legislator’s district
In-person Meeting (Cont.)

• During the meeting
  • Introduce yourself and exchange business cards
  • State the issue that concerns you (Why and how it affects you?)
    • Refer to the bill number
    • Be prepared to educate the representative
    • Speak from personal experience when possible
    • Prepare a one-page letter to guide your discussion. Give the letter to the representative or aide when you leave.
  • State the action that you want the representative to take. Ask for them to commit to support the bill.
  • Thank the representative or aide

• After the meeting
  • Follow up with a phone call, email, or letter thanking the representative for meeting with you
  • Offer another personal visit for more information
  • Address additional concerns or provide more information
Step 5: Join a group

• Reasons to join a group
  • Amplifies your voice
    • There’s power in numbers.
  • Keeps you informed via their websites
    • You will receive additional information about upcoming issues.
    • Many people are monitoring the proposed issues.

• Ways to join a group
  • KDP Public Policy Efforts
    • Discussion Board on website
    • Special Interest Group (SIG)
    • Public Policy Committee
KDP Public Policy & Advocacy

• Website: http://www.kdp.org/aboutkdp/publicpolicy.php
  • Position statement, “contact your rep,” and more!

• Discussion Board: http://www.kdp.org/mb/read.php?1,1796

• Blog: http://kdpedpolicy.org/
  • Timely, relevant updates, and information about education policy

• Twitter: #KDPEdPolicy
Review

• Step 1: Know how decisions are made / bills become law
• Step 2: Get acquainted with your representative
• Step 3: Study the proposed issue
• Step 4: Decide your method for advocacy
• Step 5: Join a group
What are your next steps?

• Your Call to Action
• How can you amplify your voice as an educator?
• What is an important issue to you today?
Question and Answer Time
Thank You!

KDP Public Policy Website:  www.kdp.org

Nathan Bond:  NathanBond@txstate.edu
Sandy Pope:  pope@tc.columbia.edu
References


**KDP Online Resources**

• KDP Public Policy & Advocacy Website http://www.kdp.org/aboutkdp/publicpolicy.php
• KDP Public Policy & Advocacy Blog http://kdpedpolicy.org/
• KDP Discussion Board http://www.kdp.org/mb/read.php?1,1796
• Twitter hashtag #KDPEdPolicy