

# Advocacy in Action:

## TIPS & TECHNIQUES

### Using a Report Card as an Advocacy Tool

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Advocacy is an important action that all professionals need to understand. Advocacy is defined as the act of speaking or writing in the support of something (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2010). The long-term process of speaking or writing in support of something is a good definition for *successful* advocacy. It is easy to speak up once and then move on. It takes an effort to develop and follow a long term plan of action for advocacy. This long-term process is critical to generate support for an issue.

Educating policymakers on the current facts and trends about our issues is important in the advocacy process. If we do not request support for recommendations from policymakers, then others will, often those from the opposite viewpoint. Policymakers often rely on evidence supplied to them by groups to stay abreast on the current facts, trends and statistics. There are numerous methods (tools) for supplying information to policymakers. This article will focus on one advocacy tool, a **report card**. A report card can be developed for a program from a single school, district, or state.

A report card is a “periodic report

often used figuratively of any critical report or evaluation” (Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 2001, p. 1216). Condelli (2005) describes a report card as “a concise presentation of data and other information about a school or program that assesses performance” (p.5). It is also an excellent advocacy tool for our profession. It is recognizable and can quickly present evaluative information to the reader.

#### Purposes

The authors believe a report card has three basic purposes: evaluate program quality; promote program improvement; and inform and advocate for programs.

*Evaluate program quality:* Condelli (2005) stated “rather than a ‘letter grade’ more often report cards use a performance benchmark as the standard for evaluation” (p. 6). For our purposes, NASPE National Standards or State Standards can be used.

*Promote program improvement:* In order to do this, we need to provide current data about the program (national, state, or local). This includes identifying the program needs and monitoring the progress of the program. This purpose

often entails making recommendations related to the areas noted for program improvement.

*Inform and advocate for our programs:* To do this, a systematic plan should be designed to identify the information to be included in the report card and how to publish and strategically disseminate the cards.

#### Six Steps to Developing a Report Card

##### Step #1:

##### *Define Purpose and Audience (s)*

- The purpose of the report card will drive the development.
- The audience will drive the design and data used.

##### Step #2:

##### *Select Measures to be Reported*

- Outcome measures
- Instruction measures
- Program and teacher measures
- Student measures

##### Step #3:

##### *Locate Current and Relevant Data*

- Locate enrollment numbers and class size in the data files at your State Department of Education.

- Rules, regulations and resolutions involving the profession are located in SDE, SBE and legislative codes.
- Survey data from state associations and universities.
- Data from AAHPERD/NASPE and from other credible sources.
- *2010 Shape of the Nation Report: Status of Physical Education in the U.S.A.*

**Step #4:**

**Select Evaluative Criteria or Rubric**

- Use objective criteria designed to reduce subjective judgments.
- Criteria/rubric should be easy to understand.

**Step #5:**

**Design the Format**

- Provide meaningful definitions to help educate the reader.
- Organize information in a logical and flowing format.
- Include current and credible data in an easy-to-understand format.
- Indicate overall recommendations or improvements needed.
- Leave open spaces to highlight significant quotes from reliable or credible or well-known authorities (i.e., Centers for Disease Control; American Medical Association; National Institute of Health; American Heart Association; American Association of Pediatric Physicians; NAASPE). These quotes might generally support physical education or health education; quotes might identify a key relationship between

physical education and academic performance; etc.

- Include reference citation in quiet, small print.
- Use attractive colors and include photos of quality actions to paint the picture.
- Use proper grammar and spelling.

**Step #6**

**Dissemination of the Report Card**

- Consider using multiple methods (mailing, e-mail transmission, website links, formal presentations, media attention, etc.).
- Focused dissemination includes presentation and explanation to select groups.
- Use credible messengers.

**Conclusions**

Many different advocacy tools are needed to get our messages to the public and to policymakers. Using a report card is one method to get this information disseminated. In order for this tool to be successful, the report card should be easy to find, easy to read, and easy to understand. An ineffective report card “can backfire and become detrimental to a program” (Condelli, 2005. p. 13). Taking the time to design a credible and effective document is worth the effort. Using the Six Steps to Developing a Report Card can help with this process. The advocate who supplies credible and accurate information using an effective tool will be successful on this long advocacy journey.

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