

Advocacy in Action:

TIPS & TECHNIQUES

School Board Advocacy: Ready, Aim, Inspire!

By:

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It is said that “all politics are local,” and the same can be said about advocacy and school boards. Advocacy is essential for retaining the progress that’s been made in the past, and for building a foundation and network for the future. Advocating for preferred programs, curricula and initiatives has always been important. According to Bruce Buchanan in the Association of School Boards Journal, “*School board members have long held themselves accountable for making sure that students are learning. Now, all across the country, they are taking the lead in*

ensuring that the next generation is healthy and fit by advocating for policies and procedures that promote good nutrition, physical fitness, and overall healthy living.” Whether that statement is accurate or not, what is clear is that preventable diseases and lifestyle maladies are impacting America’s children and youth at alarming rates.

The recent *Surgeon General’s Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation Fact Sheet* cites that “two-thirds of adults and nearly one in three children are overweight or obese.” In light of the gloomy medical statistics, and the current economic landscape of reduced income streams, diminishing budgets, high-stakes testing,

controversy over what constitutes a “core subject,” and increasing embroilment over the use of the school day, **advocacy for physical education is more crucial now than ever before!**

We know that advocacy begins each day in our classrooms and gymnasiums with quality learning-centered and standards-based programs, excellent student-centered instruction, and appropriate assessment. Yet, the

**To advocate and fail is disappointing;
to fail to advocate at all is
irresponsible.**

need has escalated to take the next-generation steps for effective advocacy – effectively reaching out to the community and the school board.

As a starting point, school boards must generally have a place in their agendas for open forum, public comment or input, or community participation, usually at the end of the agenda to accommodate residents of the district or community to speak on issues related to school board business. Wise and strategic use of this time can be a productive advocacy opportunity. As a means to organize the advocacy options with school boards, this “**Ready, Aim, Inspire**” approach might prove helpful.

Ready

Preparation to advocate is just as important as the advocacy itself. A brief review of the “ready” phase might include some or all of the following:

- Engage with a core group of top quality physical educators in the district who are willing to advocate for physical education.
- Be cognizant of policies related to teacher advocates.

• Advocate for children, not jobs.

• Remember, you “cannot boil the ocean,” so focus by selecting and prioritizing the primary

advocacy goals.

- Be mindful that local school boards care most about local children and youth.
- Identify and contact key parents or parent groups in the community who embrace and are willing to advocate for physical education.
- Secure a list of school board meeting dates, locations, etc.
- Attend one or more school board meetings to become acquainted with the environment, processes, and protocols.
- Understand that in basic terms, advocacy can take a variety of forms, to include:

- o Informing and educating
- o Shaping emerging policy
- o Advancing or blocking initiatives
- o Alerting or warning
- o Inspiring or motivating to action
- o Updating a previous outcome or decision (i.e., school board added eight additional certified physical educators resulting in over 1,600 additional children receiving quality physical education instruction daily.)
- o Encouragement and/or “thank you”

Aim

The “aim” phase is strategic in nature, determining the specific actions and materials that will be considered to meet the identified goals.

- Look long-term (6 months to a year) in planning activities.
- Gather current, valid and reputable information and data with which to make your case.
- Consider data collection and analysis from local schools to highlight the importance of your cause (i.e., Fitnessgram data and results on standardized tests).
- Prepare a one-page, well-prepared “hot list” of key physical education facts that connect to your primary goals. Be sure to include legislative or state mandates. [See NASPE Advocacy Toolkit for other useful resources]

- Prepare “sound bites” and “news briefs” that can be used for brief comment on school board agendas.
- Review and consider various techniques, such as participating on agenda, e-mail campaigns, letter writing campaigns, testimonials by parents and students, and quarterly newsletters.
- Identify the various school board members who are sympathetic to or opposed to the cause.
- Select and train a sizeable contingent of qualified, articulate spokespersons – remember that parents and students can be the best option for message delivery.
- Meet frequently to keep the group engaged and motivated to continue advocacy efforts.
- Practice verbal presentations with a “mock audience.”
- Anticipate and plan for knowledgeable responses to questions that might come from school board members, parents, or news media.

Inspire!

This is the action phase of advocacy, including a wide variety of options. This set is directed toward the idea of speaking on a school board agenda.

- Dress in business attire, arrive early, and interact with community participants before the school board meeting.
- If required, sign up on the “public comment” roster for the meeting.

- Be respectful and remain in attendance from the start to the end of meetings.
- Bring hard copies of the message you and your advocacy group plan to deliver verbally (media, parents, etc).
- When called to speak, state your name and affiliation and thank the members of the school board for the opportunity to share your comments.
- Be passionate and authentic, but reasonable.
- Keep comments clear, concise, controlled, and within the designated timeframes.
- Remain after the meeting to interact with others and be available for the media or others who have questions or comments.
- After the meeting, briefly chronicle the strengths and weaknesses of the advocacy effort and learn from the experience.

Resources

Buchanan, B. (2009) *Advocating for school wellness*. American School Board Journal (February)

Fitch, B. (2009). *Best practices in online advocacy for associations, nonprofits, and corporations*. Facebook of the Texas Medical Association.

The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation Fact Sheet (January 2010) Retrieved from <http://www.hhs.gov/news>



A global view of sport and physical education that combines an online and face-to-face approach to learning

This blended learning approach gives the opportunity to all individuals and organizations involved in physical education and sport to register free to the Sports Media Open Campus. The Open Campus is a web-based learning content management system that allows educators and coaches to create their own online physical education and sport courses. They can assemble, package and redistribute instructional content, easily retrieve, and import content. Visit <http://www.sports-media.org/atutoreng.htm> for more information.

Home page: <http://www.sports-media.org>.

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