

CASB'S Legislative Network

Key to successful grassroots
lobbying on behalf of school
districts and public education.



“Lobbyist” does not have to have a negative connotation

- Lobbying is fundamental to a democracy and our system of government. Lobbying is a citizen's right to influence government guaranteed by the First Amendment.
- Today's successful lobbyist influences legislation by conveying accurate information, building coalitions and grassroots support, and understanding legislators and the political climate.
- The single most powerful force in state lobbying is the influence of those living and working in the district of each elected legislator. Remember, you are an elected official too.



Build a relationship with your legislators

- Get to know your legislators back home – as people.
- Become a reliable and trustworthy resource.



Teach your legislators about your district

- Share your district's story, successes, and challenges.
- Help your legislators get a handle on a problem by sharing the “real world” effects of proposals.



You are an elected official too

- Board members need to develop special credibility – you as elected officials represent another unit of government charged with policymaking and are not just another special interest group.
- Integrity is key. Your word must be impeccable.



Communicating with legislators during the session

- It's difficult to be at the Capitol often – utilize other tools.
- Email is great. Access legislators' emails directly from Colorado Capitol Watch, www.coloradocapitolwatch.com.
- Phone calls still work! As do letters, although emailing the letter will be more time-efficient.



Whenever you communicate with a legislator, remember:

- Consider how a legislator thinks:
 - 1) Does this make sense?
 - 2) How does this affect my district?
 - 3) Will it help or hurt me politically?
 - 4) Does anyone back home know or care?
- Be straightforward, clear and direct.
- Tell your story and put your argument in human terms. Personalize it, i.e., “This \$2 decrease per pupil means. . .”



Whenever you communicate with a legislator, remember (continued):

- Know both sides of the issues.
- Be extraordinarily gracious but politely persistent.
- Leave written information, including contact information.
- Never write anyone off. You don't have friends in politics, only allies, and those allies can change from vote to vote.
- Give legislators feedback. A letter of thanks and some public praise go a long way.



Testimony before committee

- This is an opportunity to tell your story.
- Be brief and to the point.
- Know what you want to say.
- Use examples to illustrate how the bill will impact your district.
- Be yourself.



Your work as a “citizen lobbyist” is a year-round effort

- Arrange for legislators to visit your schools.
- Touch base periodically.
- Invite legislators to be guests at district events.



Conclusion

Advocacy work takes patience and a long-term commitment.

Remember:

- Most people really do want what is best for children and education.
- All legislators have children somewhere in their lives and certainly in the lives of their constituents.
- Schools are here to stay and people want them to be better.
- You have a success story to tell about your district.
- You are an elected official too and your local community's link to the school district.

