



Grassroots Advocacy Guide

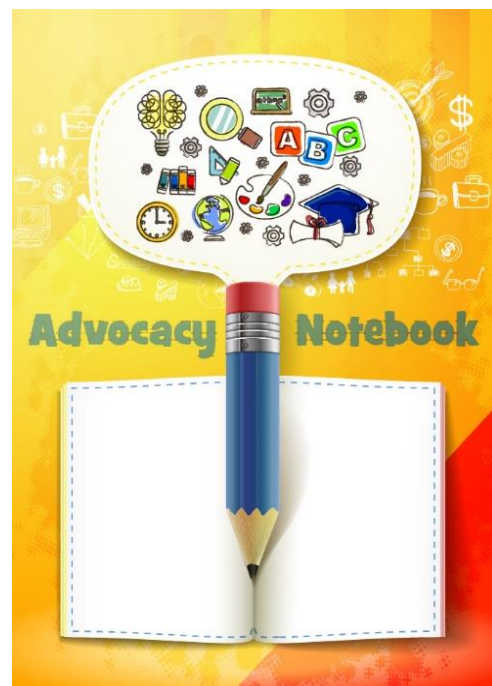
School board members play an invaluable role in their communities. If they take time to build relationships with locally elected and appointed officials, they have an effective voice in public policy that impacts education. Officials want to hear from boards because they know education is such a vital function of state and local governments and because their decisions may impact schools back home in their districts.

Legislators can make decisions best when they have the right information. Who better to keep them in touch with and informed about schools than local school board members?

AASB's grassroots advocacy program trains all interested school board members to serve as a reliable resource to lawmakers and government officials on education policy and legislative issues.

Included in the Grassroots Advocacy Guide:

- [Communicating with Lawmakers & Policymakers](#)
- [Writing or Calling with Lawmakers & Policymakers](#)
- [Building Relationships](#)
- [Legislative Glossary](#)





When Communicating with Lawmakers & Policymakers

DO NOT ...

Show disdain for politics.

Communicating to legislators that certain bills, campaigns or politics in general are not worthwhile or are dishonest will not build a good relationship.

Make demands.

Legislators serve many constituents of which you are one. Avoid demanding they vote in a particular way or produce results on a bill.

Be an extremist. Politics involves the art of compromise. Don't condemn your legislators as being too far to the left or to the right in general or on an issue.

Threaten. No one likes to be threatened with personal or political retaliation, and it seldom works.

Be friendly. Contact your legislators on a periodic basis - not only when you want something from him/her. Invite your legislators to visit your schools or perhaps have a meeting or meal with your school board. Make an extra effort to keep in touch throughout the year.

Be understanding. Walk in your legislators' shoes. Try to understand the pressures they face from competing interests on any particular issue. Realize there are many aspects to any bill or vote of which you may not be aware. Also, if you understand your legislators' goals and political philosophy you can help them understand how they mesh with your schools' needs and goals.

Be reasonable. Recognize there are legitimate differences of opinion. While you may differ on one piece of legislation, you may agree on others.

Be realistic. Remember that most controversial legislation cannot win passage without compromise. Don't expect to get everything you want in legislation you want passed, and work to make less objectionable legislation you oppose.

Be accurate. Make certain you provide your legislators with accurate information about how a bill you support or oppose will affect your school system. If your legislators can count on you for reliable information, you will establish a mutually beneficial relationship.

Be cooperative. If your legislators make a reasonable request, try to comply. You can help them by supplying needed information accurately and quickly.



When Writing or Calling Lawmakers & Policymakers

Telephone calls are no substitute for face-to-face visits, but they can be effective once your relationship with legislators is established. Your legislators' time is valuable. Identify yourself, your school system, and address the issue. If time permits, try to reach your legislators when they're at home in their districts. If you need to reach them more quickly at the Statehouse, be prepared to leave a detailed message. If the Legislature is meeting at the time of your call, ask the receptionist to have your message hand delivered by a page.

House members are difficult to reach at their individual Statehouse office numbers, and you are likely to be transferred to the House of Representatives receptionists who will take messages. With few exceptions, House members do not have administrative assistants. Call 334/242-7600 to leave messages with the receptionists.

Senators have administrative assistants who answer their Statehouse office phones when they are away. They can take more detailed messages and call you back with a response if needed. Senate administrative assistants are an important link to your senators. Call senators directly or through Senate receptionists at 334/242-7800.

Writing letters saves time for you and your legislators. It also serves as a permanent record of your position and allows you to explain your position in more detail. It is important, however, that the information you convey be accurate since your letter may be shared with other legislators. Always write to thank your legislators for seeing you, voting as you asked or doing anything else in your interest. Be quick to praise and slow to criticize.

Fax messages are quick, inexpensive and are considered important. They allow you the detail of a letter and the immediacy of a phone call. Representatives receive fax messages at 334/242-4759. Fax to senators at 334/242-8819. Make sure each fax message is individually addressed to legislators. If possible, call to confirm that it was received.

SEND AN EMAIL

Email is a rapid and inexpensive means of communication. All legislators have access to email while at the State House through a central message system.

House members receive messages at
house3@mindspring.com

Senators receive messages at
alsenate@mindspring.com.

CUSTOMIZE IT:

AASB may provide sample text so it is easier to contact legislators on an issue. Customize this text with local insight and details and always include your full name and address. That helps legislators recognize you as a constituent.

How to Build Relationships with Lawmakers and Policymakers

Get to know them by first name. It helps to know local legislators and their key staff members on a first-name basis and to make sure they know you by name and position. Help them become familiar with local schools and the impact their decisions have on those schools. Become a useful resource so legislators will seek the school board's opinion when education issues arise.

Know the legislative process and the issues. Stay informed. Look at the legislative calendar and know the composition of key committees, particularly those related to education and budgeting. Go online to alabamaschoolboards.org for [bills of interest](#), and read AASB's legislative newsletter, [Advocate for Schools](#). Look for calls to action from AASB's government relations director, and respond to those.

Find areas of common agreement. A good way to foster a positive relationship with a legislator is to identify a common concern or issue and develop a plan to work toward accomplishing it.

Disagree agreeably. No one really likes to lose, but you won't always agree with or even win every round with lawmakers and policymakers. Simply state the facts and your position and attempt to understand the reason for his or her position. If you still disagree, then look forward to working with the legislator on a future issue.

Get the word out. Board members can share important news about key education issues supported by lawmakers and policymakers. You can speak to local groups, write letters to the editor, share news on social media platforms and so on. An added benefit to this approach is – by keeping people informed – your community will come to understand the issues and feel comfortable contacting legislators on your behalf.

FOR THE RECORD

Tracking bills. Throughout the legislative session, track education-related bills and actions online at AlabamaSchoolBoards.org (choose the Advocacy section).

Copies of acts. Find copies of acts at www.sos.state.al.us in the "Government Records" section.

Sharing tips. Pass along tips and any information you may have about an education advocacy issue. Contact AASB's governmental relations team at 334/277-9700.

Giving feedback. AASB's resolutions inform the association's advocacy agenda. Delegates decide on amendments and changes suggested by the Resolutions Committee during the association's winter convention. Submit proposed resolutions or changes to AASB.



LEGISLATIVE GLOSSARY

Adjournment - Termination of a legislative day upon the completion of business with the hour and day of the next meeting being set prior to adjournment.

Baseball - A work agenda, usually employed in the Senate, which allows members to bring up bills they wish to pass. Baseball rules, set by the Rules Committee, usually specify that a bill may be considered unless one (or sometimes more) member objects to its consideration. In the event a bill is objected to, it counts as a "strike." Members get three "strikes." If they can't pass a bill in those three opportunities, their turn is over. Turns "at bat" may be determined by the Rules Committee or through a random drawing of district numbers.

BIR - A **budget isolation resolution** accompanies every bill until the House and Senate have dispensed with the General Fund and Education Trust Fund budgets. Because the Alabama Constitution requires the budgets to take precedence over other legislation, a three-fifths majority of members in each chamber must vote to adopt the BIR for a bill to be considered before the budgets are approved.

Companion Bills - Bills which are identical in content and which are introduced in the House and Senate are called companion bills.

Conference Committee - A committee formed to settle differences between House-passed and Senate-passed versions of a bill when one (or both) of the chambers disagrees or votes to non-concur with the other chamber's bill. Conference committees usually are comprised of six members - three each from the House and Senate - appointed by each chamber's presiding officer. The compromise reached by the conference committee is called a **conference committee report**; it must win concurrence of each chamber to win passage.

Consent Calendar - An agenda of non-controversial bills which may be voted up or down. No debate, floor amendments, or substitute bills are allowed. Bills placed on the consent calendar in the House are posted for three legislative days. Unless 11 House members contest placing a posted bill on the consent calendar, it will remain on the calendar to be voted upon on a certain legislative day.

Engrossment - The process of producing a copy of a bill as it is amended by one chamber before sending to the other chamber. An engrossed bill is checked for accuracy and amendments included in the body of the bill. Often bills are forwarded without engrossment.

Enrollment - Once a bill has passed the Legislature, it is typed into final form and signed by both presiding officers before sending it to the governor. This is the enrolled version of the bill.

Filibuster - Extended debate on a bill. Filibusters often are used as delaying tactics to prevent action on a bill or future action on another bill. Filibusters technically can occur only in the Senate, which historically has allowed virtually unlimited debate on a bill. The House imposes time limits on debates, which technically prevents a filibuster.



LEGISLATIVE GLOSSARY

Introduction - When a bill is first presented in the House, it is introduced by one or more sponsors and assigned to a committee by the presiding officer of the House. Under the Senate's new rules, however, bills first presented in that body are assigned to a committee agreed upon by the Lieutenant Governor and the President Pro-Tem. A bill may be (and usually is) introduced in both the House and Senate. The introduction of a bill also is called its **first reading**.

Regular Session - The annual legislative session deals with the Education Trust Fund and General Fund budgets, as well as any other legislation. Regular sessions begin on the third Tuesday in April of the first year of legislators' terms of office (quadrennium); on the first Tuesday in February of the second and third years; and on the second Tuesday in January of the fourth year.

Second Reading - When a bill is passed by a committee (also called "giving a **favorable report**") with or without amendments or a substitute and is reported to one of the chambers.

Third Reading - When a bill comes up for consideration on the calendar, it is read. At this point, amendments are considered and the bill is either defeated or passed and sent to the other chamber.

Sine die - Final adjournment of a legislative session without designating a day to which the Legislature adjourns.

Special Order Calendar - Is a work agenda offered by each chamber's Rules Committee on most legislative days. A special order calendar may be for one day only or be a continuing special order calendar in effect until the bills contained on it are dispensed with. Special order calendars in the House may specify time limits for debate on bills.

Special Session - A legislative session, called by the governor, to focus on one or more subjects. Special sessions may be called at any time and in an unlimited number.

Substitute - An extensive revision of a bill which may substantially alter its original intent. A substitute may be offered in committee and then adopted by the House or Senate. Any member also can offer a floor substitute when a bill is voted on in his/her chamber.

Sunset - Agencies or laws that are set for periodic review and evaluation. A joint legislative sunset committee may recommend continuation, changes or termination of a subject agency or program. Unless the House and Senate vote to continue an agency or program subject to sunset, it automatically is discontinued.