

♣ Five Steps to Effective Advocacy ♣

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Meade

Whether you are lobbying a state or federal legislator, talking to a school principal or county administrator, or advocating for a change in policy at your work setting – like better cafeteria offerings – effective advocacy skills are essential for understanding your “community” and influencing policy within that community.

Advocacy efforts are most effective when they are targeted and specific. Know what you are after and what needs to be changed. Create a plan that outlines the who, what, when, where and how:

- *Who:* Who needs to be influenced? Who will help advocate for change?
- *What:* What are the key messages you need to communicate? What changes are you hoping for? What are the best ways to communicate those messages?
- *When:* When are the best opportunities to advocate for change?
- *Where:* Where are the best places to influence and promote change?
- *How:* How will you bring about change and garner support for your efforts? How will you communicate key messages - what settings will be used to communicate key messages?

Step # 1: Determine “WHO” the target audiences are and “WHO” will help

- ✓ Key decision makers in the organization
- ✓ Other key players or influencers
- ✓ Partners to help in the advocacy effort

It is essential to identify the key decision makers that will determine the outcome of your efforts. These can be elected officials like school board members, county or other local leaders, state legislators, school district superintendent and principals, county health leaders. It is also essential to identify the key influencers – people who play a role in influencing the decision maker. These can be friends of the decision makers, their secretary or administrative “right arm,” staff members that support the school board or legislators, children, a husband or wife. Spend some time identifying who the influencers are and make sure they are included in your advocacy efforts.

Line up partners to help bring about change and look to garner support from an array of potential advocates – the more voices that speak up with a consistent message, the better your chances of promoting change. Partners may include:

- Local school food service directors
- Principals and vice principals
- Athletic directors, coaches, PE/ health teachers
- Superintendent

- School board members
- PTA leaders
- Students
- Local vendors or bottlers

Remember, one lone voice may not cause them to vote or act a particular way. But if enough players band together to promote change and let decision makers know it -- that can be very persuasive. Your job includes identifying key decision makers and their influencers, informing others of your position, building support for your position, and target key decision makers.

Step #2: Know “WHAT” you are after

Any advocacy effort – whether trying to make small changes in a school cafeteria or promote a large, county-wide wellness policy, must have a goal in mind – know specifically what you are hoping to change and what your outcomes should be. Make them clear and easy to understand.

Step #3: Know “WHEN” to advocate for change

Determine if there are “golden” opportunities to advocate for change. Is there a state-wide public health meeting where a key influencer can be invited to attend? Is there a school-based wellness/nutrition initiative that a key decision maker can be invited to?

Step #4: Know “WHERE” to advocate for change

This will vary and should include different locations. You may want to develop a list of partners to testify in front of the local school board – school boards hold open meetings and schedules are generally available via school board or school system web sites. If you are promoting a school health issue, you may want to hold a meeting or public gathering at a local elementary school and invite key decision makers and influencers. Meet with PTA leaders and ask to brief the larger PTA body – many school districts have larger, district-wide PTAs that oversee the school-based ones.

Step #5: Know “HOW” to advocate for change

Once you have your key messages, it will be important to develop some effective tools to promote those messages and help influence decision makers. The key is to be **CONCISE** and **DIRECT**. Often times, decision makers do not have a lot of time to spend discussing issues. In addition, elected officials and other decision makers have a lot more practice doing the talking; make sure you get your points across in an “easy-to-understand” way. While it is not uncommon to “freeze up” when meeting face-to-face with key decision makers, there are some simple techniques that will help you get past the initial scare and help you make your points quickly, vividly and directly.

- ✓ **A picture tells a thousand words.** When talking to key decision makers, use easy-to-understand graphs, pictures or tables – it provides a good opportunity to explain the issue.
- ✓ **Memorize a little speech, just a minute-and-a-half or two minutes long.** It should include your name and position; that you live/vote/work in their district or organization (if influencing legislators); any organization or coalition that you represent as well as key people that support your position; state the problem, solution, and action in terms your grandmother can understand. For example, “We really need your support in approving the county wellness policy – it will mean healthier foods for all kids in schools and more recess in elementary school” and hand over a one or two-page fact sheet that includes a name, address, phone # and e-mail.
- ✓ **Use the media to promote your message.** Using the media, such as the local paper, school or business newsletter, radio call-in show, twitter and facebook, helps reach even more of those “other voters,” key decision makers, influencers, and others who can help in your efforts. Make your concerns known and they may provide positive media coverage of your issue.
 - *A Letter to the Editor* is effective and an often-read part of any paper.
 - Get to know your local writers, radio station announcers, and TV newscasters – local papers love health and nutrition stories.
 - Reporter and policy maker e-mail addresses and twitter handles are easily accessible - send them updates, notes and story leads.
 - Offer to write an article, conduct a class or host site visits for media.