ADVOCACY: The Role of Grassroots Advocacy in Policy Solutions

Nate von der Embse, NASP Chair, GPR Committee
Kathy Cowan, NASP Director, Communications @KCowen5

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“If you are not at the table, you are on the menu…”

--Author Unknown
Types of Advocacy Important to Ensuring Effective Policy & Practice

• Professional
  – Helping people know who you are, what you do, and why it matters
  – Demonstrating value through actions

• Direct/Legislative
  – Communicating with decision makers about a specific issue
  – Asking a lawmaker to support or oppose a specific piece of legislation
Understand the Legislative Process

How a Bill Becomes a Law

**New Bill**
- Introduced by member
- Numbered and printed
- Sent to committee

**Committee considers bill and...**
- Recommends that bill pass (with or without changes)
- Recommends that bill does not pass
- Holds bill

If recommended favorably

**House of Representatives**
- Debates bill
- Amends bill
- Votes on bill

If bill passes, goes to

**Senate**
- Reviews bill using similar process
- Reaches agreement with House*

**Bill goes to**

**Governor**
- Signs bill and it becomes a law
- Takes no action and bill becomes a law
- Vetoes bill, which dies unless overridden by 2/3 vote of General Assembly

* Both houses must agree to identical versions of the bill. If they can't, a conference committee may be set up with representatives from both houses to resolve disagreements.

Role of Federal Law in Education

1. Requires specific actions in order to RECEIVE Federal funds
2. Requires specific actions in order to AVOID monetary or other penalties
3. Determines how Federal funds MAY or MAY NOT be used
4. Determines HOW MUCH Federal funding is available.
5. Ensures due process protections for protected classes of students
Regulatory/Implementation Process

- **Law** - What must be done
- **Regulation** - How it can be done
- **State Rules** - What all districts and schools must do
- **Implementation/Local Policy** - What it looks like in practice
Example

Law: IDEA 2004
- Expressly permitted RTI process
- Ability/achievement discrepancy model no longer mandatory

Federal Regulation
States:
- may no longer require districts to use severe discrepancy
- must permit them to use RTI, and
- may permit them to use other research-based alternatives.

State Rules
- Different in each state
Role of State/Local School Boards

• Significant influence over how state will implement federal/state law
• Influences school finance decisions
• Can create state/district policy
  – Particularly important in absence of state/federal law
    • e.g., bullying/harassment/discrimination policy
Good communication is essential to all types of advocacy.
Becoming an Effective Advocate

Follow the plan and never forget for whom you are really speaking.
Key Components of Effective Advocacy

1. Know What You Want
2. Recognize Opportunity to Act
3. Build Strategic Relationships
4. Gather Evidence (Research, Data, Examples)
5. Use Consistent, Effective Communication
6. Engage and Evaluate

Positive Change in Policy & Practice
1. Know what you want

Identify how the world should be.
How we want the world to be.

All children and youth thrive in school, at home, and throughout life.
Reality vs. the Way You Want the World to Be

Pair/Share

Describe your vision for a safe and successful school.

(2 minutes)
2. Recognize Opportunity to Act
Assess the Situation/Set An Agenda

1. What are the current priorities of your state/district school?
   – How do they align/conflict with your goals?
2. Consider current policies and practices in your district/state?
3. Are there adequate resources available?
4. Examine existing legislation/policy
5. Where do you need to focus your efforts?
   – Legislators, federal/state agencies, state local school boards?
Integrate Local, State and National Agendas

Current National Education Priorities

• Closing the achievement and discipline gap
  – Improved accountability and indicators of school quality
• Addressing resource inequity
  – Improving school psychology ratios
• Educating the whole child
  – Comprehensive school psychological services
• Creating safe and supportive learning environments for all students
  – Preventing bullying, harassment, discrimination

How does this align with issues important to your state departments of education, state school board, or local school districts?

How can you use the national conversation to advance your state or local agendas?
Key Priorities

1. **Safety**: All students should attend school in a safe and supportive environment that balances physical and psychological safety

2. **Mental health**: Access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services promotes student learning and school safety

3. **Personnel**: We must remedy the shortages of school psychologists to create access to comprehensive school psychological services

4. **Equity**: Systems must ensure accountability and efforts to address disparities in access to services and supports

5. **Funding**: Federal investments in education are critical to helping achieve these goals (Title I, Title II, Title IV-A, IDEA)
Gather Information

• What data do you have/need to collect to highlight the need for change?

• What is the cost of NOT solving the problem?

• What counter-arguments may you encounter from naysayers?
Understand Your Value

• What specific training, skills, expertise and experiences make you relevant?

• You need to be able to communicate:
  – Who you are and what you do
  – Why you are specifically qualified to do this work
  – HOW you directly contribute to improving student and school success
You get on an elevator to find the Superintendent of your district. He is headed to a meeting to discuss how to implement a new violence prevention law that requires the district to consider school security improvements. He asks…

“You’re a [insert your role]. Do you have specific issues or concerns that you think I should share?

You have **one minute** to respond.
3. Build Strategic Relationships
(Key Decision-Makers, Allied Partners/Coalitions, Grassroots, Grasstops)
Key Decision-Makers

• Have significant control/influence over policy, practice, priorities, resource allocation, decision making

• Can be building, district, community, state leaders

• And/or practitioners/professionals, elected officials, advocates

• Broad in relevance or specific to an issue or goal

• Relationships may be new or ongoing
Allied and Strategic Partners

• Individuals, member/professional associations, or organizations.
• Partners share your vision, understand the challenges, and are relevant to implementation.
• Help you make progress with diverse and important stakeholders.
• Have long-term, relevance to your work/goals and natural relationships that should be nurtured on an ongoing basis.

Both types of relationships require intentionality to be effective regarding advocacy.
Relationship Structures

1. Organic, collegial, regular shared experience (e.g., work and professional colleagues)
2. Planful, organized (e.g. professional associations and coalitions)
3. Networks (e.g., grassroots, advocacy membership organizations)
4. Leadership (e.g. organizational leaders/grasstops)
Relationship Strengths/Opportunities

• Shared planning and workload
• Opportunity to convey ideas, influence views/decision-making
• Ability to receive/provide trusted feedback
• Ability to activate/motivate
• Ability to create common voice

All of which improves effectiveness and outcomes
Importance of Coalition Building

Coalition: Group of diverse stakeholders who come together to advance a shared goal.

National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (Formal, Long term, issue/professional focus)
• Members include school psychologists, counselors, social workers, administrators, SLP, OT, PT

Committee for Education Funding (Formal, Long term, funding focus)
• Members include colleges, universities, research organizations, professional associations, unions, etc.

Save Medicaid in Schools Coalition (Formal, Short term, legislative focus)
• Members include health care experts, educators, disability rights advocates

Framework Author Group (Informal, Long term, legislative/professional practice focus)
What Makes a Good Advocate?

- Knowledge and interest in public policy and understanding of:
  - Legislative process in your state
  - Regulatory process and role of state agencies
  - Jurisdiction of state/local school board
- Basic knowledge of advocacy strategies
- Positive, enthusiastic and friendly
- Good at listening and communicating
- “Visionaries”
- Committed to act
- Responsible with good follow-through
- Able to represent the profession/your issue with balanced perspectives
Grassroots Advocates

• “Grassroots” refers to a network of people who seek to raise awareness or advance a specific “ask” at the federal, state and/or local level
  – Rely on the general public and specific constituencies
• Grassroots can be mobilized to build support for a specific issue
• Grassroots can be activated by organizations in order to respond to a specific issue
• Grassroots can spur an organization to act on a specific issue

Incredibly powerful and effective! NASP grassroots helped shape ESSA.
Grasstops Advocates

- Members/leaders of an organization who maintain relationships with key decision makers
- Activists or public figures who care about your issue
- Strategically reinforce grassroots efforts
- Reinforce credibility of your position
- Carry message of the grassroots to targeted decision makers

Most effective when coordinated with grassroots efforts
NASP’s Long-Term Advocacy

• Built network of **key partners** overtime (NAESP, NASSP, PTA, NASRO, ASCA, SSWAA)

• Developed relationships with key congressional staff; **reputation for expertise** and ability to provide timely, quality resources

• Established and utilized **grassroots network**

• Maintained and **repeatedly conveyed key messages** (adapting to audiences and circumstances) overtime
Leveraging the School Safety Framework

Opening for Change

Convening Allies & Partners

Garnering Support

Taking Collective Action

Dissemination

Impact
Effect Relationships

• Offer value
• Don’t wait until you need help
• Collaborate
• Avoid “turf battles”
Hallway Conference

What key relationships do you need in order to advance change in your district? What are 2 steps you can take to develop these relationships?

5 minutes
4. Gather Evidence (Research, Data, Examples)
Support Your Point/Refute Their Point

1. Data
   – national, state, local
   – scope of problem, barriers, available resources
2. Use social math
3. Research
   – How we know what works
4. Put a face on the issue
   – Real stories about kids, families, and educators affected
Listening Task

Throughout PPI, listen for and note data points and sources that resonate with you as particularly useful in your meetings on the Hill Wednesday and your advocacy back home.
5. Developing Key Messages and “Ask-Fors”
Know Your Stakeholders’

Risks/Concerns

Goals/Hopes
Key Message Goals

- Get their attention
- Connect to a priority
- Minimize suspicion/reactive rejection
- Engage discussion
- Be easy to remember

- Key messages can’t convey everything
You have to identify the most important:

- Why
- What
- WOW!

...factors.

Why does this matter to them?
Generally 3 Core Messages is Optimal

(It’s hard for people to remember more than 3 things at a time.)
Effective Message Structure

• Problem statement
• Action/solution
• Benefits

Easy for People to Grasp
Umbrella Statement:
Think: How can we engage qualified target personas?

Core Message #1
What pain point will your product/service solve?

Core Message #2
What is the unique value of your approach?
(you can work in a key “brand message” here)

Core Message #3
How does your solution work, and why does your prospect need it now?

Conversion persuasion points: evidence, proof points, support and confidence points (ie. how it worked for other clients/customers).
Anza Message House

Anza...

...supports high potential social entrepreneurs in Tanzania. Our services assist entrepreneurs to strengthen their operations, increase profitability, and scale their social impact.

Key Message: Belief
Social entrepreneurs have the skills and knowledge needed to tackle some of the biggest social and environmental challenges facing Sub-Saharan Africa.

Proof Point
Example non-Anza social business

Proof Point
Publication on impact of social entrepreneur-ship

Key Message: Challenge
Social entrepreneurs lack access to the services & support to help them survive and scale.

Key Message: Model
We provide a tailored range of business services through our 12 month social business accelerator.

Key Message: Results
Our assistance leads to successful social businesses and lasting social and environmental impact.

Key Message: Growth
We are contributing to building and strengthening the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Tanzania.

Proof Point
In the 2016 ‘Ease of Doing Business Rankings’, Tanzania ranks 139 out of 189

Proof Point
The average interest rate on loans in Kilimanjaro is 20%

Proof Point
International professionals

Proof Point
We are proving x business with x support

Proof Point
Facts based on M&E results. E.g. No. of lives impacted

Proof Point
Social business success stories

Proof Point
Innovation Mapping and Anza partnerships

Proof Point
Running of African Innovation Prize Tanzania
## The Problem

1. Many students have had traumatic experiences.

2. Trauma can impact learning, behavior, and relationships at school.

## The Solution

3. Trauma-sensitive schools help children feel safe to learn.

## How We Get There

4. Trauma sensitivity requires a whole school effort.

5. Helping traumatized children learn should be a major focus of education reform.

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**WELCOME VIDEO**

Director Susan Cole describes the work of the Trauma Literacy Project Institute (TLPI).

**HELPING TRAUMATIZED CHILDREN LEARN**

We believe that understanding the impact of trauma on children is essential for creating a supportive learning environment.

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**READ MORE...**

"The teachers tell me I’m smart. They say I’m just not trying."
In conversations on the Hill…

Problem: *Students who do not feel safe at school will not learn to their fullest potential but hardening our schools is not the answer.*

Solution/Action: *Schools must balance physical safety with psychological safety to create positive, safe school environments.* This includes using security strategies such as environmental design and improving our mental and behavioral health services.

Benefit: *Supporting students’ mental health, improving our crisis team capacity, and employing common sense security measures helps our students feel both safer and more connected, get direct supports more easily, and control their behavior, concentrate, and learn.*
Problem: *Students who do not feel safe at school will not learn to their fullest potential but hardening our schools is not the answer.*

- Critical personnel shortages of school-based mental health professionals result in unmet needs across the country and undermines comprehensive school safety efforts.
- Policymakers have focused on ineffective school hardening efforts (e.g. metal detectors, armed security) which do not improve school safety, and can decrease student perception of safety while increasing problematic behaviors.
- Inappropriate use of punitive discipline practices as a substitute for effective behavior management and threat assessment/mitigation processes do not improve school safety and can perpetuate the school to prison pipeline.
In conversations on the Hill…

Solution/Ask for/Action: *Schools must balance physical safety and psychological safety to create positive, safe school environments.* This includes using security strategies such as environmental design and improving our mental and behavioral health services.

- Fully fund Title IV Part A to increase investments in comprehensive school safety and mental health services.
- Support federal investments to help reduce the ratios for school-employed mental health professionals, who are critical members of school safety and crisis teams.
- Support efforts to improve evidence-based and on-going professional development for school safety/crisis teams and threat assessment teams.
In conversations on the Hill.....

**Benefit:** Supporting students’ mental health, improving our crisis team capacity, and employing common sense security measures helps our students feel both safer and more connected, get direct supports more easily, and control their behavior, concentrate, and learn.

- Access to school-based mental health services improves students’ academic performance, and reduces costly negative outcomes such as risk behaviors, disciplinary incidents, dropout, and involvement on the criminal justice system.
- Properly trained safety/crisis teams are better able to identify/intervene with students at risk of harming themselves or others.
- Implementing security measures that don’t create a fortress environment both creates safer spaces and makes the most cost-effective use of valuable resources.
Connect With Your Audience

- Appeal to emotion as well as intellect.
- Use a story to put a face to the issue.
- Avoid overly technical language.
- Be a good listener.
- Clearly articulate your “ask”
Throughout PPI, listen for and note key messages that resonate with you as potentially useful in your meetings on the Hill Wednesday and your advocacy back home.
6. Engage and Evaluate

*Identify and implement strategies; assess their effectiveness*
Three Types of Strategic Communications & Advocacy

- Crisis Management
- Action Request
- Proactive Outreach Communications

Crisis
- Sharing information
- Urgent/in the moment

Targeted
- Resolving a problem

Universal
The superintendent has followed up on your initial ideas and wants you to present them to the school board. What are the 3 key messages most important to this stakeholder group regarding balancing physical and psychological safety?
The Basics to Remember

• Follow the identified path
• Find allies
• Stick together
• Tap your strengths
• Get to know the man behind the curtain
• (And always be prepared for flying monkeys)
Preparing for the Hill Day
Tips from Key NASP Advocates

• Have a **one minute elevator speech** that describes your role as a school psychologist and the work you are engaged in.

• Develop **three concise messages** and practice how you want to deliver them.

• Remember that **you have unique expertise** that the legislator/staffer does not. You are the expert in the room!

• Utilize the **communication skills** you have in communicating complex information to parents in communicating the importance of mental health services to legislators.

• Use **social math** and numbers to highlight the importance of the issue you want to convey.
Tips from Key NASP Advocates

• **Share personal stories** about your work or children you have worked with that align with a piece of legislation or a policy topic you hope to discuss.

• **Be yourself!!!** Legislators want to hear YOUR story as their constituent.

• If a staffer/legislator appears distracted in your meeting, **don’t take it personally.** They are masters of multi-tasking.

• It’s ok to say “I don’t know.” Don’t attempt to answer a question you don’t know. **Offer to find out the answer and follow up with the correct information.**

• Practice kind manners, be respectful, and **always leave with an ask.**

• Follow up with any promised information and a **thank you note.**
Hill Meeting Fishbowl
Remember: Leveraging PPI to Create Change

For each presentation/activity....

Note the:

• The big ideas (1-3) that resonate with you
• Points of data that seem most compelling
• Key points relevant to reality back in your state or district

Consider:

How might you convey these ideas and examples in simple terms to someone else
Final Questions or Comments?