

# Practicing Legislative Advocacy as a School Counselor

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# What is Legislative Advocacy?

Legislative advocacy involves working with lawmakers, who make decisions that affect our students' wellbeing.

- Students, families, and counselors can experience stress due to cuts in funding.
- Laws can directly impact a client's life, such as laws that affect undocumented students (Brubaker & Goodman, 2012).
- Sweeney (2012) suggested that counselors have a professional responsibility to educate lawmakers about the work we do.

# What Are Legislators Like?

Most politicians have similar characteristics:

- Politicians hold public office to help others.
- Politicians are good learners, but do not know everything.
- Politicians have many demands on their time.
- Politicians have limited resources.
- Politicians like to be thanked.
- Politicians love good press.
- Politicians are always running for office.

(ACA, 2007)

# Meeting with Legislators in Person

Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way to communicate with legislators.

You can identify the lawmakers who represent you on the following websites:

- <http://capwiz.com/counseling> (U.S.)
- <http://www.ncleg.net> (North Carolina)

If a lawmaker is unavailable on Legislative Day, you can request to meet with a legislative assistant instead.

(ACA, 2012)

# Strategies for Meeting in Person

Your meeting may be more effective if you:

- Make an appointment.
- State that you are a constituent.
- Explain the reason for the meeting and emphasize that you will need fewer than 30 minutes.
- Limit the number of issues you discuss and refer to bills by name and number.
- Bring supporting materials to accompany your presentation and provide copies. (ACA, 2007)

# Sending a Letter or Email

The second most effective method for contacting lawmakers is to send a personalized postal letter or email message. Form emails are much less useful.

Letters should be addressed appropriately:

The Honorable [FULL NAME]  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [LAST NAME]: (ACA, 2012)

# Strategies for Letters & Emails

Your message may have a greater impact if you:

- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Limit the letter to one page if possible.
- Ask the legislator to do something specific, such as vote for a particular bill.
- Discuss how the issue is affecting people in your community.
- Share personal stories related to the issue.
- Identify disagreements with the lawmaker but are polite and avoid criticism. (ACA, 2007)

# Building the Relationship

Legislative advocacy is most effective if counselors create ongoing relationships with lawmakers:

- After every meeting, record what happened: who you met with, the issues you discussed, and the lawmaker's response.
- Write a thank you letter that summarizes the points you made.
- Send the legislator a copy of a photo you took or a newsletter that mentions the meeting.
- Contact the legislator again and invite her or him to continue the conversation. (ACA, 2007)



# Online Resources

ACA's "Call to Action!" website ([capwiz.com/counseling](http://capwiz.com/counseling)) can help you email your U.S. senator or representative.

- Remember to personalize the email.

Additional advocacy resources are available at:

- The Legislative Affairs subgroup on ASCA SCENE ([schoolcounselor.groupsite.com](http://schoolcounselor.groupsite.com))
- The National Center for School Counselor Advocacy website ([advocacy.collegeboard.org](http://advocacy.collegeboard.org))
- CSI's webpage on advocacy ([csi-net.org](http://csi-net.org))

# NCSCA Legislative Agenda

Our 2011-2012 agenda, based on a 2010 survey of NCSCA members at our fall conference, focuses on:

- **Preserving school counselor positions**
- Protection of counselors' time
- The student to counselor ratio
- Pay scale
- Testing coordinator positions

# Preserving Positions

Economic conditions have put our jobs in jeopardy.

- In 2011, Governor Perdue suggested a 5% cut for Instructional Support Personnel, which includes school counselors, social workers, and media specialists.
- The NC Senate and the NC House included the same cut in the final budget.
- Discretionary funding cuts have caused some districts to lose additional positions over the past several years.

## Student to School Counselor Ratios

Wyoming:	183:1
New Hampshire:	232:1
<b>ASCA Recommends:</b>	<b>250:1</b>
Virginia:	318:1
Tennessee:	344:1
<b>North Carolina:</b>	<b>385:1</b>
South Carolina:	390:1
Minnesota:	771:1
California:	810:1

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# References

Brubaker, M. D. & Goodman, R. D. (2012). Client advocacy in action. In C. Y. Chang, C. A. Barrio Minton, A. L. Dixon, J. E. Myers, & T. J. Sweeney (Eds.). *Professional counseling excellence through leadership and advocacy* (pp. 141-161). New York, NY: Routledge.

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