The Art of Advocacy

A Legislative Toolkit
Who Me? A Lobbyist?!

• Lobbying is the process of gathering information for the purpose of persuading someone to agree with you.

• Think of it as a political campaign.

• The first objective is to get a commitment from a voter, in this case, a legislator. The second is to win a majority of the vote.
Who Me? A Lobbyist?!

What’s important when lobbying, or advocating for/against an issue?

• Preparation
• Precision
• Professionalism
• Politeness
• Presence
Who Me? A Lobbyist?!

• Easy Persuasion
  – Start with letters and phone calls
  – When you contact legislators, make it personal
  – If you are a constituent, say so

• Be Seen and Heard
  – Try a personal visit (i.e.: to the Capitol, invitation to your media center)
Who Me? A Lobbyist?!

• K.I.S.S.
  – Focus on a limited set of issues

• Do Your Homework
  – Know the legislator’s name and political party
  – Know your issue well

• Have a Plan
  – Offer solutions

• Don’t Leave Empty Handed
  – Ask for a specific action
Who Me? A Lobbyist?!

• Lobbying is Persistence
  – Follow-up encourages action

• Never Give Up
  – “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!”
Who Me? A Lobbyist?! 

Don’t

– Threaten
– Insult or offend
– Write off anyone
– Ramble or preach
– Presume the legislator is familiar with your issue
Who Me? A Lobbyist?!

• Take the Message Home
• Think globally. Act locally.

“All politics is local.”
~ former Speaker Tip O’Neill

“When you get ‘em by the grassroots, their hearts and minds will follow.”
~ former Senator Everett Dirksen
Myths

• I can’t make a difference
• Somebody else will do it
Tips

• Your only commodity is your credibility.

• If you can’t answer a question confidently, say so and tell them you will get them the information – be sure you follow up with that information within a day or two.

• Most legislators respond best when given a concise message, especially during a short meeting. Prioritize your concerns.
Tips

• Include relevant statistics, studies and statements that support your cause. Save time for the legislator and make their job easier by offering to be a resource they can turn to in the future.

• To be an effective advocate, take the next step and offer a solution.

• If you invite a legislator to your school, don’t “clean it up” or make it over-tidy. Let them see the media center “in action.”
Making it Personal

• Letters should be short and to the point – no more than one page.
• Be clear about the origin of the views you express – are they your personal opinions or are you representing a group, like GLMA?
• If you are writing as a professional, use letterhead.
• Signing preprinted or template letters is less effective than writing your own personal letter.
• Call ahead and ask the staff if the legislator prefers a fax, email, or snail mail.
• If you are mobilizing colleagues or employees, edit the letters for correctness but allow them the freedom to express themselves.
Making it Personal

• While phone calls and letters are important, nothing is as effective as a face-to-face visit. If you want to make a more substantial difference, invite legislators to your school, visit them at the Capitol or in their district office.

• The Georgia legislature is in session for only a few months (Jan.-April), and most legislators spend weekends at home during the session. Many hold public meetings in their districts, which is an excellent opportunity to talk with them.
Making it Personal

• Personal stories are highly persuasive.
• Use real life, everyday examples to explain to a legislator how a particular issue might impact you, your school, and most importantly, your students.
• Make your examples as local as possible – mention schools, parents, etc. in their district.
Making it Personal

• Don’t forget to follow up.
• Be polite and persistent. Most legislators hate to say “no.”
• If you take the time to follow up, you have a better chance of getting a response to your request.
The “Ask”

• Close your letter or meeting by requesting a specific response or action.

• Legislators can sponsor legislation, write to state agencies (i.e.: DOE) regarding proposed rules and regulations, vote in a particular way.
Resources

Georgia General Assembly
www.legis.ga.gov
Georgia Department of Education
www.doe.k12.ga.us
Live Legislative Broadcasts (during the session)
Contact Your Legislator
http://openstates.org/find_your_legislator
Resources

GLMA Executive Office
2711 Irvin Way, Suite 111
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404-299-7700 phone
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