

# ADVOCATE ...IT'S YOUR JOB!



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## WHAT IS GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY?

In the broadest sense, grassroots advocacy means any effort to advance or defend the interest of an individual or group by society at a local level. Put more simply, it means trying to get what you want for yourself or someone else through the involvement of common citizens.

Advocacy takes place within the political or governmental sector: the legislative process, executive agencies or the courts. This is because the government has the ultimate responsibility for passing and enforcing laws; committing public resources; defining rights and obligations; and deciding guilt or innocence, punishment or remedy.

## WHY ADVOCATE?

Because local boards of education are part of the political system in South Carolina, and because school board members are elected officials themselves, board members may see themselves as the people making the decisions, instead of trying to influence the decisions. But, there are a number of reasons why school board members cannot function effectively if they ignore the larger political environment.

Under South Carolina law, school boards “manage and control” local schools. School boards do not have “self-executing” powers; any authority is granted by the General Assembly.

Likewise, school boards do not have independent authority to raise revenue. The General Assembly decides what kinds of taxes or fees school boards can impose and defines the tax base on which school taxes are levied. The legislators may also impose controls on school district budgets and spending through local or statewide legislation.

State and federal laws and regulations have a great impact on the management and operation of school districts. Just a few of the areas affected include: employee rights, benefits and working conditions; building and transportation safety codes; environmental regulations; student and staff civil rights; and investment and accounting practices.

The primary responsibility of schools is to educate students. But neither schools nor children exist in a vacuum.

Other institutions also touch the lives of children. Local governments deal with the safety of a child’s walk to school or provide health services. Other agencies deal with children whose families cannot or will not support them. Disadvantaged or disabled children may need help that the school alone cannot provide.

In each of these cases the ability of school boards to carry out their mission is affected by decisions made at other levels of government. School board advocacy means working to influence those decisions in the interests of local and state education.

“NEVER DOUBT THAT  
A SMALL GROUP  
OF THOUGHTFUL,  
COMMITTED CITIZENS  
CAN CHANGE THE  
WORLD; INDEED, IT’S  
THE ONLY THING  
THAT EVER HAS.”

**MARGARET MEAD**

- AMERICAN  
ANTHROPOLOGIST  
(1901-1978)

# HOW CAN A BOARD GET INVOLVED IN ADVOCACY?

## STEP ONE

SCSBA's grassroots initiative incorporates the veteran Board Legislative Contact (BLC) program, and offers ideas and resources to increase our effectiveness. SCSBA established the BLC program ten years ago in order to be more proactive on legislative and policy issues and to respond in a timelier manner to matters before the General Assembly.

The BLC program serves as the main link between the board and SCSBA on legislative matters by assigning one board member the responsibility of moving advocacy efforts forward. That board member is called the BLC and is either elected or appointed by the board.

LEGISLATORS RELY ON SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES TO LET THEM KNOW THEIR VIEWS ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES. SCSBA'S GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY INITIATIVE IS A SERVICE DESIGNED TO ASSIST SCHOOL BOARDS TO BECOME MORE INFORMED ABOUT LEGISLATIVE ISSUES IMPACTING THEIR SCHOOLS AND BE MORE ACTIVE LEADERS IN SHAPING DECISIONS AT THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVELS.

**ACTION: The board MUST elect or appoint a Board Legislative Contact who generally serves a two-year term. Boards should notify SCSBA each time this position changes.**

### BOARD LEGISLATIVE CONTACTS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As a crucial link between their school board and SCSBA, BLCs increase the effectiveness of SCSBA to proactively support or oppose legislation and respond in a timely manner to matters before the General Assembly.

The BLC is the board's key person to ensure advocacy efforts move forward. He/she may be part of an advocacy or legislative committee if the board wishes to have more of its members directly involved.

The BLC ensures the performance of a variety of tasks including:

- coordinating with the board to identify educators and community members to be part of SCSBA's advocacy network;
- signing up to be a member of the SCSBA advocacy network on the SCSBA Web site and ensuring other board members do the same;
- establishing an active local grassroots advocacy group;
- serving as the point of contact on legislative matters;
- providing regular reports to the board regarding legislation;
- working with district officials and board members to obtain the background information on the potential local impact of pending legislation;
- organizing letter-writing campaigns to legislators with other participants, such as board members, administrators, parents, teachers, students, civic leaders, and others within the community who care about education;
- contacting local groups about pressing legislative issues;
- attending training seminars on various legislative issues; and,
- establishing positive relationships with representatives, senators and state board of education members

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## STEP TWO

The ability of school boards to carry out their mission is affected by decisions made at other levels of government. School board advocacy means working to influence those decisions in the interests of local and state education. A board's commitment to advocacy through the adoption of a clear policy (BJ) is a key step in this process.

SCSBA's model advocacy calendar (BJ-E) provides a suggested roadmap to activities designed to keep the board active in advocacy throughout the year.

**ACTION: The BLC should ask the board to adopt a School Board Advocacy policy (BJ); the administrative rule outlining the BLC's recognition and role (BJ-R); and SCSBA's model advocacy calendar exhibit (BJ-E).**

*Following are sample policies and model advocacy calendar.*

### SAMPLE BOARD POLICY SCHOOL BOARD ADVOCACY CODE BJ ISSUED MODEL

Purpose: To establish and clarify the advocacy role of the board.

The board, as an agent of the state, must operate within the bounds of state and federal laws affecting public education. If the board is to meet its responsibilities to the residents and students of this community, it must work vigorously for the passage of new laws designed to advance the cause of good schools and for the repeal or modification of existing laws that impede this cause.

Therefore, board members will keep themselves informed of pending legislation and actively communicate board positions and concerns to elected representatives at both the state and national level.

In addition, the board will work with its legislative representatives (both state and federal), with the South Carolina School Boards Association, the National School Boards Association and other concerned groups in developing an annual as well as long-range legislative program.

Board members will participate in the SCSBA Delegate Assembly, the SCSBA Board Legislative Contact Program and the Federal Relations Network as deemed appropriate by the board.

STATE LAWMAKERS  
WILL ESTABLISH  
EDUCATION POLICY,  
REGARDLESS OF  
WHETHER OR NOT  
YOU TAKE AN  
ACTIVE ROLE IN THE  
DECISION-MAKING  
PROCESS. AS A  
SCHOOL BOARD  
MEMBER, YOU WILL  
BETTER SERVE YOUR  
CONSTITUENTS  
IF YOU HELP  
SHAPE POLICY BY  
PARTICIPATING IN THE  
LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.

Adopted \_\_\_\_\_

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# SAMPLE BOARD POLICY ADMINISTRATIVE RULE

## BOARD LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

### CODE BJ-R ISSUED MODEL

At its annual organizational meeting, the board will appoint a member as its Board Legislative Contact (BLC) to the South Carolina School Boards Association (SCSBA). At least once each month, the board meeting agenda will include an opportunity for the BLC to report on educational issues pending on the state and federal levels.

The board will work with the BLC, SCSBA, the National School Boards Association and other concerned groups and organizations on matters of mutual interest.

Each year the board will develop a short and long term legislative plan. The plan will contain at least the following elements.

A method of maintaining regular contact with state and federal legislators and/or legislative staff to receive updates on education issues in the legislature and to inform them of the potential effect(s) on the district of pending legislation.

A method of networking with other groups, such as PTA, Chamber of Commerce, community action groups or service clubs, to discuss education and legislative issues.

A method for having board members meet with legislators at least once per year, either in the district or in Columbia.

A method of networking with other board members from the district within a geographic region (e.g. county or other unit) to share information, discuss legislative issues and plan collective responses.

The BLC will serve as the board's liaison to SCSBA, will attend the annual legislative conference and other state and regional association meetings as approved by the board and will advise SCSBA of the board's views regarding SCSBA's legislative positions and activities.

Issued \_\_\_\_\_

## January

Legislative session begins.  
Schedule advocacy as a board agenda item.  
Share with the board the protocol for legislative alerts.  
Invite district delegation to board meetings on a regular basis.  
Hold a grassroots network meeting to review upcoming session and give members legislator's contact information.

## February

Attend NSBA Federal Relations Network Conference in Washington, DC  
Attend the advocacy workshop at SCSBA annual conference.

## March

Attend Day at the Capital  
Meet with district delegation at the capital.  
Share what district representative has learned from the FRN conference with the local delegation.

## April

Hold a grassroots network meeting to do the following.

- report progress of key legislation
- determine next steps
- future meeting date(s)

Invite legislators to tour district's schools.  
SCSBA solicits proposed resolutions for next year from school boards.

## May

Invite district delegation to special events.  
Invite legislators to commencement ceremonies.

## June

Legislative session ends  
Write district delegation thanking them for their support of public education.  
Nominate legislators district's board believes would qualify for SCSBA's Champions for Public Education award.  
Publicize the nomination with local media (ex., letter to the editor).

## July

Identify issues for next legislative session.  
SCSBA legislation committee reviews proposed resolutions for the next session.

## August

Hold grassroots network meeting to do the following.

- provide legislative wrap-up
- share and evaluate success and challenges
- thank network members for their work and celebrate

Recognize the network in the school newspapers or a story in the local paper about citizens involved in advocating for public education.  
SCSBA board of directors approves proposed resolutions for the delegate assembly.

## September

Be sure to invite delegation to back-to-school events

## October

Meet with delegation in the district.  
SCSBA sends out proposed resolutions for delegate assembly.

## November

Hold organizational meeting with grassroots network.

## December

Attend legislative and advocacy conference  
SCSBA legislative platform adopted at delegate assembly

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## STEP THREE: ESTABLISH AND UTILIZE GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY NETWORK

SCSBA offers two paths for boards to take in advocating for its schools: **Board Driven** and **Board & Administration Driven**. Respectively, the first path allows for the election/appointment of a Board Legislative Contact (BLC) to lead grassroots advocacy efforts while the other path is driven by the district's superintendent and administration.

School boards can choose between two between the two different paths for building their local grassroots advocacy networks:

- The **board driven** program is led by the appointed/elected BLC and utilizes SCSBA's Web-based and telephone advocacy tools to communicate legislative information with network members. Critical legislative information goes directly from SCSBA to network members.
- The **board & administration program** requires support of district personnel and the use of district equipment and resources to communicate legislative information with network members. Critical legislative information goes from SCSBA to the district, which the district may pass on to its network directly or may tailor the message before sending it out.

No matter which program a board chooses, the BLC and district personnel must take the following steps to build networks.

### FIRST: SETTING UP YOUR NETWORK

Each school board should identify constituents in schools and the community who are willing to advocate for the school district as a member of the district/board grassroots advocacy network. Network participants must be willing to share their opinions and insight with state and federal legislators on education legislation impacting their community's schools. Once each participant agrees to join the network, the school board must collect his/her contact information (see Advocacy Network Sign-up Card samples) including street and mailing addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and any other information necessary for timely communications. The school board, depending on the program it chooses, will use this information to communicate information on legislation, including positions on proposed legislation, legislative alerts and daily legislative updates with network members.

- Under the board and administration driven program, contact information for all network members is compiled and retained by the school district. Legislative information provided to school board members and superintendents by SCSBA is used by the board to communicate with network members.
- Under the board driven program, contact information for all network members is collected by the BLC and sent to SCSBA to compile and retain. Legislative information is sent directly to network members by SCSBA through its Web-based system and telephone messaging system. Note: Due to technical requirements, only members with home street addresses and email addresses may participate in SCSBA's Web-based system.

#### Tips on choosing advocates

Make sure you choose people who approach education issues from diverse perspectives. Parents, religious leaders, senior citizens, health professionals, business people, realtors, and law enforcement officials are just some of the people in your community who may be affected by education policy changes. Elected officials will be more responsive when they recognize that you represent a cross-section of their constituencies. Taken as a whole, a diverse group represents a community movement and cannot be dismissed as an isolated viewpoint.

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## SECOND: TRAIN THE ADVOCATES

Members of the district's advocacy network need to understand the purpose of the advocacy network and what they are being asked to do. Advocacy training is a critical component and can be accomplished in a training session (contact SCSBA for a sample training session agenda) or through printed materials, such as an advocate's tool kit. The type of information shared with network members will vary from district to district; however, there are several points to cover including (but not limited to):

- The role of the advocate to communicate directly or indirectly with legislators by email, letters, telephone, etc. and keeping up to date during the legislative session by reading the newspapers, state house reports on the Web, and political Weblogs.
- The role of the advocate to share information on legislation with other education and community groups, including staff, parent advisory groups, media partners, ecumenical partners, community leaders and senior citizen advisory councils.
- The process that the district or SCSBA uses to keep advocates informed on education legislation as it moves through the process, including email, fax or telephone alerts. All alerts from SCSBA will include a summary of the issue and talking points advocates may use in communicating with their legislators.
- Information on how the legislative process works.
- Legislator contact information and how and when to contact them.

## THIRD: HOLD AN ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORK MEETING

The initial meeting of the network is to determine the organizational structure of the network (see sample letter of invitation) and should include such items as

- Goals and objectives
- Strategies and assignment of tasks to members
- Meeting dates, time and locations

*Following are sample sign-up cards, and a sample organizational meeting invite.*

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## BOARD & ADMINISTRATION DRIVEN ADVOCACY NETWORK MEMBER SIGN-UP CARDS

*These easy-to-reproduce cards can be used to collect contact information from advocacy network members. Just insert information in the areas as indicated in brackets, copy, cut and distribute to your advocacy network members.*

[INSERT DISTRICT LOGO HERE]

### JOIN THE [INSERT DISTRICT NAME HERE] ADVOCACY NETWORK

As an advocate, you provide the grassroots voice to federal and state legislators on issues impacting our schools and the students they serve. As a member of our advocacy network, we will send you timely information on education legislation being debated in the State House and how those proposals will impact the governance and/or operations of our schools. All we require is for your willingness to share your thoughts with legislators. Joining the [name of district] advocacy network is easy. Just complete the following information below and return it to:

[insert name of board legislative contact]

[insert mailing address]

[insert telephone number]

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address (if different from above) \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone Number (area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax Number (area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

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## BOARD-DRIVEN ADVOCACY NETWORK MEMBER SIGN-UP CARDS

*These easy-to-reproduce cards can be used to collect contact information from advocacy network members. Once the cards are completed, send them to SCSBA, Attn: Brenda Arrowood, at 1027 Barnwell Street, Columbia, SC 29201.*



### JOIN THE [INSERT DISTRICT NAME HERE] SCSBA ADVOCACY NETWORK

As an advocate, you provide the grassroots voice to federal and state legislators on issues impacting our schools and the students they serve. As a member of our advocacy network, the South Carolina School Boards Association will send you timely information on education legislation being debated in the State House and how those proposals will impact the governance and/or operations of our schools. Information is provided primarily by email but may also include recorded telephone messages. All we require is for your willingness to share your thoughts with legislators. Joining the [name of district] advocacy network is easy. Just complete the following information below and return it to:

[insert name of board legislative contact]

[insert mailing address]

[insert telephone number]

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Home Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address (if different from above) \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone Number (area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax Number (area code) \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

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## SAMPLE LETTER INVITING ADVOCATES TO ATTEND ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

TO: School board members  
Community members  
Superintendents  
Etc

FROM:

DATE:

RE: Grassroots advocacy organizational meeting

At the request of various education advocates in the district, we are organizing a grassroots advocacy organizational meeting at **(insert location)**. Every public school district in XX County and across South Carolina is facing the challenge of how to deal with state funding for our schools. Many districts are being forced to cut programs at a time when education standards for student achievement are increasing. It is critical to share these realities with our state elected officials.

Please join us for a meeting of **(insert name)** County School Officials on **(insert date)**. The meeting will be held at the **(insert meeting location and time)**. The purpose of this meeting is to develop a strategy for discussion of education issues in anticipation of a future meeting with state legislators from XX County. Please bring ideas and stories the district is facing because of the decisions state legislators are making in Columbia.

A concerted grassroots effort that speaks with one voice is an effective way to build relationships with local legislators. As every one of you know, there is no public group closer to the grassroots of the community and schoolchildren than our elected boards of education. Together, we can have a very powerful voice.

**RSVP and contact information here.**

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## STEP FOUR

It is hard to get where you want to go without a plan. SCSBA encourages boards to develop a specific advocacy plan using the ideas given and others that you generate locally and/or with a brainstorming exercise. Contact SCSBA for a sample Advocacy Action plan.

SCSBA is ready to assist boards in developing an advocacy plan.

### **SCSBA can help build your plan by . . .**

- providing training and material on goal setting and effective lobbying
- serving as a clearing house for good ideas on grassroots advocacy
- serving as a mobilizing force on critical issues in the Legislature
- providing legislative information

## STEP FIVE: THEN WORK YOUR PLAN

Don't forget to recognize those who support your board's advocacy efforts, whether they are ordinary community members and local businesses or whether they are members of the district's legislative delegation. SCSBA's *Champions for Public Education* award is an excellent means to provide this recognition. Criteria and nomination form follow on next page.



### **Purpose**

To recognize community residents, organizations or local businesses/industries whose support of and contributions to public education have significantly benefited the entire school district or public schools statewide.

### **Deadline**

Nominations are accepted year round.

### **Eligibility**

South Carolina residents of school districts are eligible as long as they are not employed by the school district.

### **Judging Process/ Timeline and Recognition**

Each entry is judged based on award's set criteria (see nomination form) and not against other school district entries. Instead of nominees competing for a single award, there may be multiple winners.

Entries are judged by members of the SCSBA Awards Committee, representatives of public education organizations and/or SCSBA staff as they are received.

Once the entries are judged, the awards committee takes its final recommendations for approval to the association's board of directors at its next quarterly meeting (January, May, August and December).

Champions for Public Education award presentations are made locally, either as part of the board's regular meeting or at a special event in the district as determined by the local board by a member of the association's board of directors or senior staff. In addition to the special local recognition, news releases are provided to local media and others as requested by the winner. SCSBA may further showcase winning programs in SCSBA publications, on the SCSBA Web site and at Boardmanship Institute workshops.

### **Photos**

Award recipients are asked (not required) to submit a digital photo of the nominee for use by SCSBA in publications, on the SCSBA Web site and at Boardmanship Institute workshops.

### **Instructions**

See nomination form for criteria and instructions.

For more information contact:

Debbie Elmore, SCSBA communications director  
1.800.326.3679 or delmore@scsba.org



## SCSBA CHAMPIONS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION NOMINATION FORM

*(Attach form to supporting information, materials)*

Name of School District Board: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person, organization, business, etc. being nominated: \_\_\_\_\_

If nominee is an organization or business, name of key contact person: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of organization, business or individual being nominated: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number of nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

Board member/district staff completing form: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

District size:     Small (up to 2,999 students)     Medium (3,000 – 8,999)     Large (9,000+)

Local media to be notified if nominee is selected: \_\_\_\_\_

Board chairman's signature \_\_\_\_\_

*(certifies that board supports nomination)*

### Criteria

Tell how your nominee meets the criteria listed below.

Use no more than one 8½ x 11 sheet for each criterion. Type double-spaced with a 250-word maximum per page. Staple to nomination form.

Address each of the four criteria concisely and factually, with specific examples. Provide your nominee's name in the upper right-hand corner of each sheet.

1. Shows leadership in support either of ongoing or special programs authorized by the school board or SCSBA.
2. Demonstrates, through actions, pride, the school district and effectively works for the betterment of the schools in the district as a whole or for public schools statewide.
3. Understands public education's importance to democratic society and does his/her/its part to inspire support for quality public schools within the community or state.
4. "Makes a difference" for the entire school district or schools statewide because of his/her/its involvement.

Please include photograph of nominee if available.

Mail to: SCSBA Awards, 1027 Barnwell Street, Columbia, SC

THE SOUTH CAROLINA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION 1027 BARNWELL ST. COLUMBIA, SC 29201

