Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don’ts

Advocacy is Critical

- Privilege and responsibility to contact Texas legislators about issues important to you
- Regular sessions meet only once a biennium but offices are open year-round
- You are the experts
- “I didn’t hear from anyone”
- 5.4 million students / largest item in state budget
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

How can my voice be heard?

► Determine who represents you
► Phone call
► Personal visits
► Correspondence – email or written
► Provide public testimony
► Know the basics of the process – Congress vs. Texas Legislature
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

Who represents me?

➤ Generally speaking, you want to contact only *your* legislator on issues/bills as they respond to their own constituents who elect them.

➤ Texas House website, “Who Represents Me,” provides House, Senate, and congressional representatives.

➤ Exception: committees when hearing or voting on a bill of interest.

➤ Don’t forget governor’s veto power (bill or line item veto: 10- or 20-day time frame).
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

Phone Contact

▶ Be prepared – brief notes outlining bill number, position and rationale
▶ Tell your legislator/office what you would like them to do/vote
▶ If you can’t speak with the legislator, ask for the staff member who covers education-related issues
▶ Provide contact information if appropriate
▶ Be courteous and professional
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

Email or Written Correspondence

▶ Brief introduction of yourself, include the bill number, your position and rationale – BRIEF

▶ Spelling, grammar, punctuation and tone

▶ Contact information – want to be seen as a resource

▶ Inquire about the legislator’s position

▶ Be professional and courteous
 Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

Personal Visits

▶ Schedule an appointment if possible – staff or member
▶ Limit to 30 minutes max – maybe less during session
▶ Dress professionally – better to be overdressed
▶ Prepare materials, “leave behinds” (one-pager vs. War and Peace)
▶ Follow up – a thank-you note/card also serves as reminder of visit
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

Public Testimony

▶ Dress professionally
▶ Be brief – often strict time limits imposed
▶ Speak clearly and don’t read your testimony
▶ State your position on the bill upfront
▶ Thank them for the opportunity
▶ Offer to be a resource or answer any questions
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

General Do’s

▶ Be professional to all (dress, speaking, written materials)
▶ If you don’t know the answer, tell them you will get back with them – and follow up
▶ Offer to be resource on your issues – school finance, business operations
▶ Be brief; “make it fit on a bumper sticker”
▶ Stay engaged, build and nurture relationships
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

General Don’ts

▶ Don’t be disrespectful
▶ Don’t answer if you don’t know – credibility is your best friend
▶ Don’t overload staff or members with information – time sensitive
▶ Don’t wait for the regular session – start today
▶ Don’t assume they know school business
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

Examples

- Egos (no lack of confidence at the Capitol)
- Head games (don’t fall for them)
- Prepare to be interrupted / challenged /questioned
- Credibility is key
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

Oh, my…….

- Emails – think before you click, PLEASE!!!!!
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Useful Information to Have on Hand

▶ Annual budget
▶ Student population (enrollment and demographics)
▶ Fund balance (designated vs. undesignated)
▶ Tax rate, local debt, LHE
▶ Administrative costs (what they include)
Advocacy 101 – Do’s and Don'ts

Vote, Folks!

- 1 governor
- 1 lieutenant governor
- 150 House members
- 31 Senators

= impact lives of 5.4 million students, 340k teachers, 1,200+ districts and charter schools, 8,500+ campuses
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