

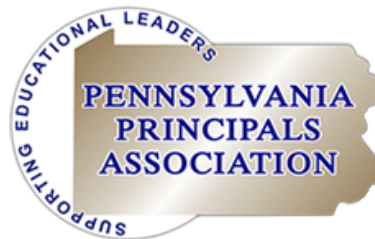
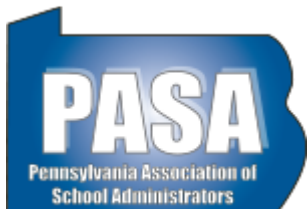
# Public Education Matters

## Advocacy Workshop



Be a voice for your children!

*Presentation adapted from the School Leader Advocacy Training Program*



# Understanding Advocacy

## Understanding Advocacy:

**What is it?**

**Why is it important?**

**What is the role of school stakeholders?**



# Advocacy: What is it?

Actions by individuals or organizations to influence government decision-making that brings about a desired policy or funding change.



# Why Is Advocacy Important?

Impacts of state and federal government decisions permeate public education

- Funding
- Tax policies
- Mandates
- Regulations



*Every minute of a child's school day is controlled by an elected official or the appointee of an elected official.*

# Advocacy: The Role of School Stakeholders

Parents and community members are critical messengers. They have:

- Knowledge
- Credibility
- Visibility
- Commitment to children and the community
- Clout, when messages are delivered in volume

***Bottom line: Parents and community members can make a difference!***

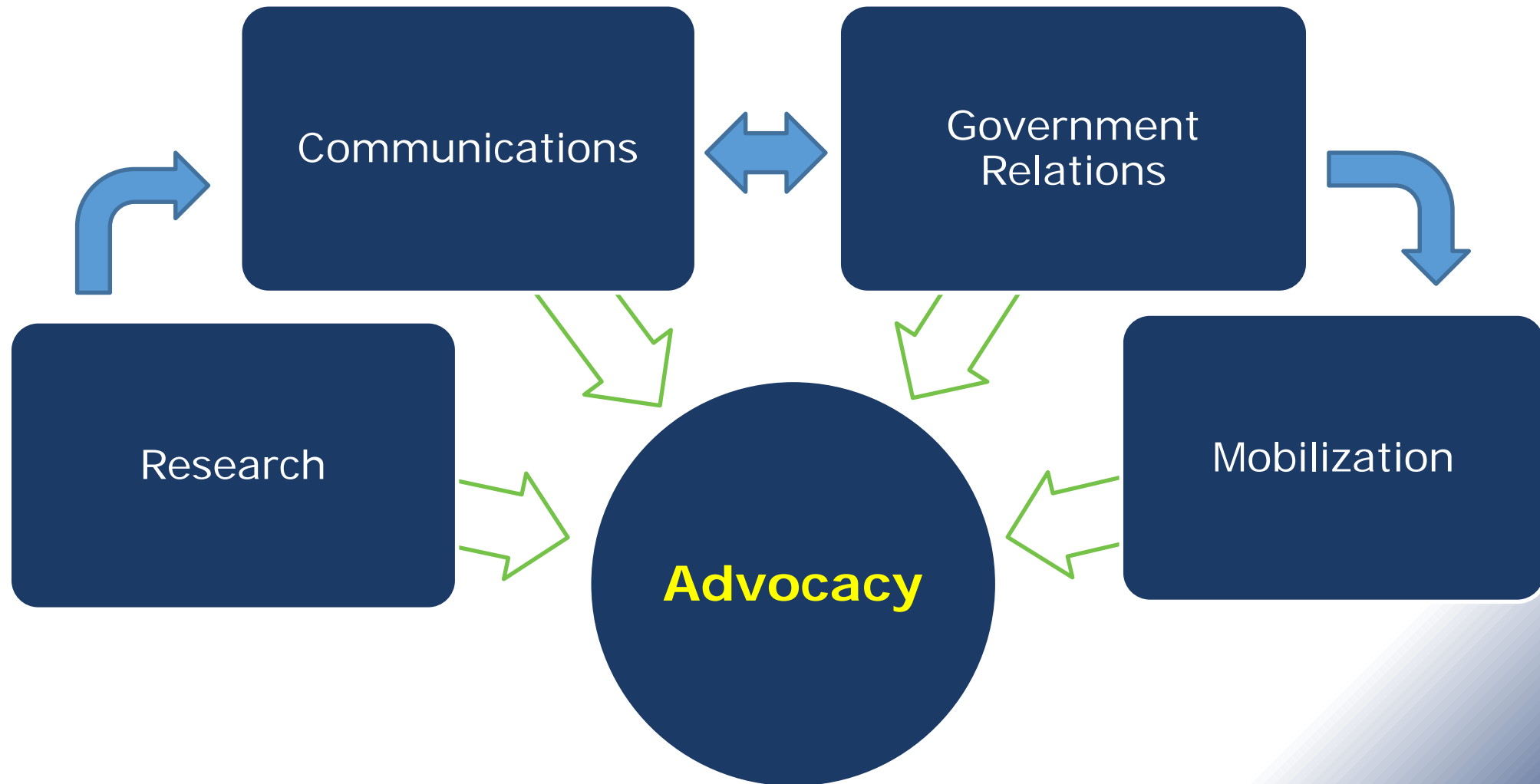
School districts must deal with the consequences of state and federal government decisions. These decisions affect your children!

# Advocacy Makes a Difference

**Advocates have played a role in successes on the state level:**

- Enactment of a new Basic Education Funding formula
- Over \$500 million increase in Basic Education Funding over last four years

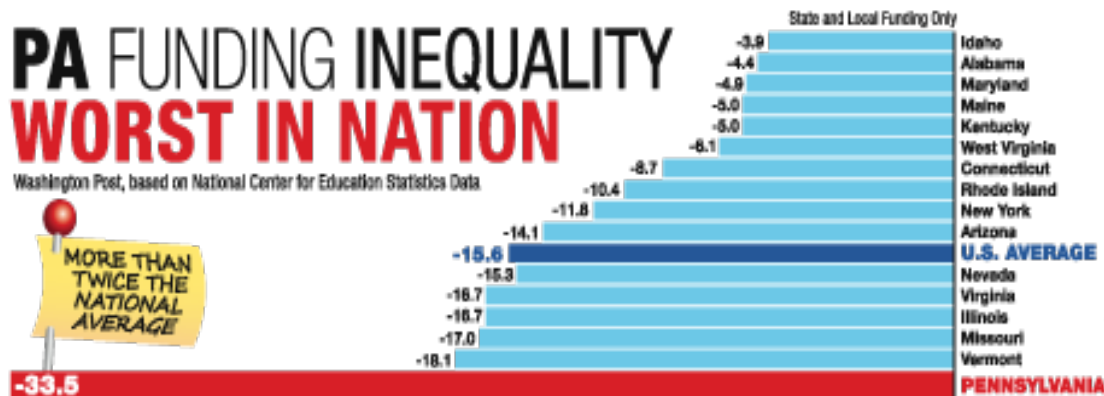
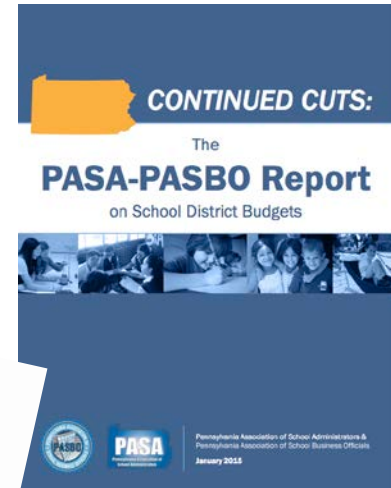
# The Elements of Advocacy



# Research

The foundation for your message

- Data
- Surveys
- Case studies
- Personal stories





# Communications



## Crafting and delivering your advocacy message

- Generate press coverage through public events, press releases, reports, op-eds & letters to the editor
- Conduct social media campaign to:
  - Communicate with elected officials
  - Engage reporters & cultivate news coverage
  - Expand, educate & mobilize your network to act

# **What is an advocacy goal?**

**The specific change or action you want government decision-makers to make to create the desired policy or funding change you seek to support your school.**

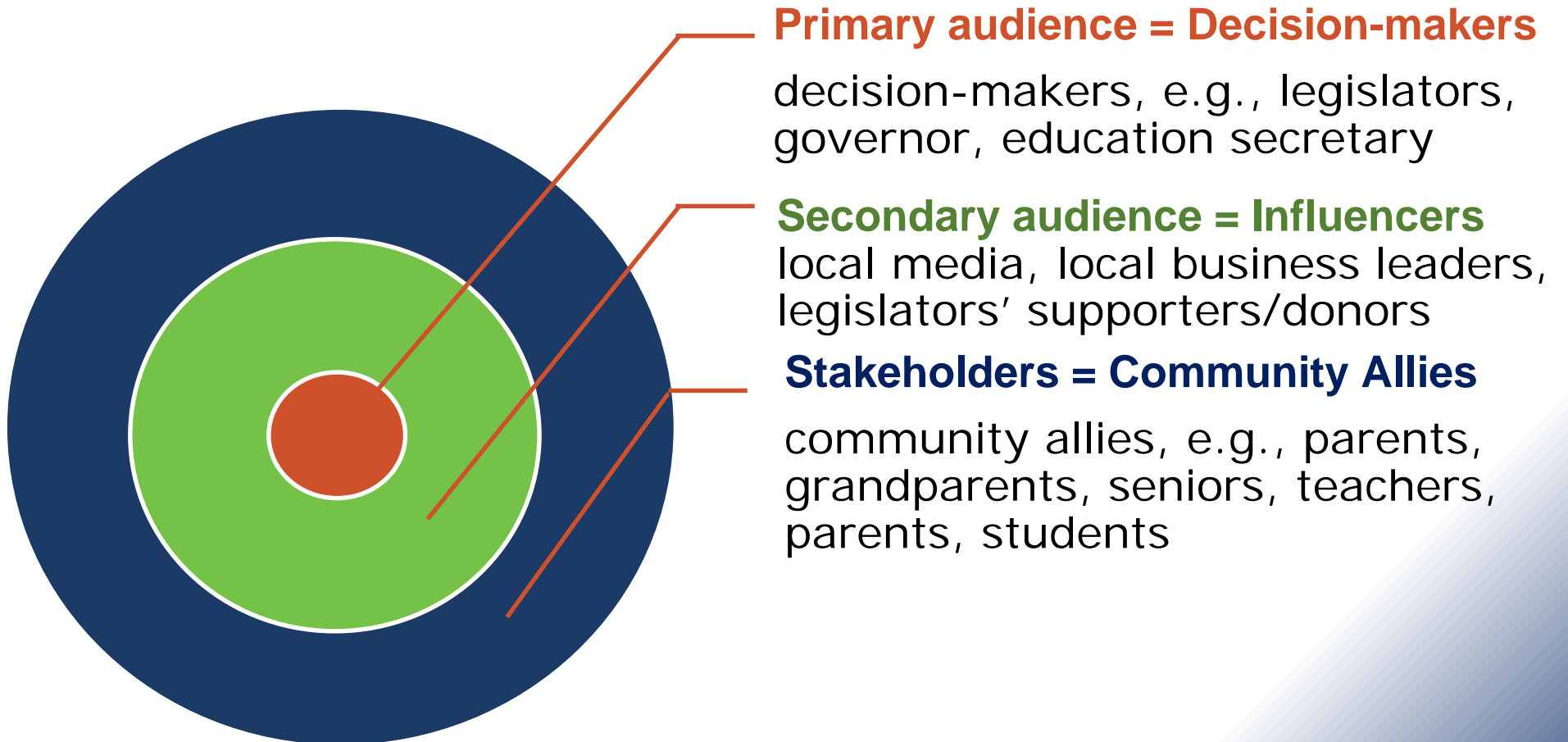
# Target Audiences

Once you've identified the goal of your issue or concern, you need to determine the people and groups that can help you achieve it.

Those are your target audiences.



# Target Audiences



# Mobilization

- Build and activate networks of individuals and organizations to participate in advocacy efforts
  - Call or email legislators
  - Visits to legislators
  - Local events, town halls, forums, coffee klatch
  - Submit op-eds & letters
  - Recruit other volunteer advocates
  - Spread the word through social media

# **Understanding the Issues**

**Understanding the issues: how to identify and arm yourselves with the essential facts and information**

# Gathering Facts and Stories

Amplify your advocacy message by telling your story, which should include:

- Compelling anecdotes
- Quantitative data (important statistics, facts) and programmatic information

You must know how to access useful information on the issue.





# Information Resources

Education associations have array of resources – individually and collectively

- Bulletins and updates
- Position papers and issue briefs
- Research reports
- Testimony
- Videos



Also: Follow them on Twitter and Facebook

# Information Resources

Think tanks and research institutions

- Research for Action
- Temple Center on Regional Politics
- Keystone Research Center/PA Budget and Policy Center
- Numerous national groups

Government – PDE, Legislative Education Committees

Morning emails from Keystone State Education Coalition – best single resource for PA education articles

Create your own google alerts with keywords relating to your school or specific topics

# Message Development

**Discussing how to develop a clear, concise and compelling message for each target audience**



# Why it Matters

- Words still matter
- Good stories still matter (and they still sell papers, lawmakers, stakeholders)
- Targeted audiences require targeted messages



# What Is Your Advocacy Goal?

For example:

- More state funding for your school
- Stop voucher programs that take money from public education for private education
- A fair tuition rate for cyber-charter schools

# Assess Your Audiences

Have answers for your target audience questions, e.g.,

- What do they know, think and feel about public schools or the issue your advocacy goals seek to address?
- What messages and messengers would be most persuasive to them?

# The Core Message/Elevator Speech

## Elevator Speech

- The entire pitch in 100 words or less
- Includes overarching message for the issue
- Includes “must have” points for primary audience

## Supporting Messages

- Drill down to specific target audiences
- Tailor but remain consistent throughout



# The Core Message/Elevator Speech

“Pennsylvania’s school funding system is broken because the state is not paying its fair share. Some kids just cannot get a good education. Our state pays for a lower share of public education than 46 other states. That gap is leading to layoffs and overcrowded classrooms. We don’t have enough teachers. Schools are offering fewer courses and using out-of-date books and technology. We’re all paying higher property taxes. Harrisburg needs to step up with more dollars that are fairly distributed so every child can get a good education -- no matter where they live.”



# Supporting Messages

- Public schools are primarily funded by a combination of state funding and local property taxes.
- But PA pays for only 37% of school of public school costs, leaving local taxpayers to pick up 56% of costs.
- That is driving up property taxes across the state and just last year, 37% of school districts increased class sizes, and 33% cut teachers and other staff in the past year.
- This is not just a city problem – most rural schools don't have the funds adequate to give students a quality education.
- Students at rural districts with the least to spend are all performing below average on state English and Math exams.

# Mobilizing Local Support

**How to mobilize local support by building your own network for advocacy and/or coordinating with existing networks**

# Local Advocacy Network

Why is it important?

- Legislators care about what their constituents are thinking and saying
- The more constituents legislators hear from and the wider variety of voices, the greater the influence
- School officials cannot do this alone

# Local Advocacy Network

What would a local advocacy network look like?

Group of committed, informed individuals

- Other school officials
- Teachers
- Parents
- Business people
- Existing local advocacy groups or others concerned about your schools



# Local Advocacy Network

What does an advocacy network do?

Agree to take a range of actions, depending on their abilities and comfort level:

- Call, email or write to elected officials
- Visit elected officials in their offices
- Submit op-eds or letters to the editor
- Participate in or speak at events
- Help recruit others to get involved

# Build a Pool of Prospects

- Start with friends, family, and co-workers
- Reach out to leaders and members of like-minded local groups, if any
- Start a conversation: how is your school affected? How are students affected?
- Look for opportunities for public outreach
  - ✓ Board meetings
  - ✓ PTA or other group meetings
  - ✓ Roundtables or community forums

# Engaging Prospects

Once you identify prospects, what's next?

- Make contact and ask for help
  - ✓ Build an email list
  - ✓ Make phone calls
  - ✓ One-on-one or small group meetings
  - ✓ Social media
- Get them the tools they'll need: toolkit and up-to-date information



# Engaging Prospects

- Track whether and how people respond
- Thank them!
- Refine your list
  - ✓ Who will take action?
  - ✓ What action are they willing to take?
  - ✓ How often?



# Keeping the Network Engaged

- Make it formal or informal
- Provide regular updates (your own or from other organizations)
- Use the communications modes (e.g., emails, social media) you feel most comfortable with
- Make regular, reasonable asks
- Ask the most engaged and effective to increase involvement and leadership

# Think and Share Activity

How would you begin building a network?

- Who would you start with?
- Are there local groups already engaged?
- What would interest them?
- What would your first asks be?
- How would you structure a network?
- How would you communicate?

# Contacting Lawmakers



**How to engage and build relationships  
with lawmakers and their staff**

# Build a Relationship

- If a lawmaker does not know you, find an ally who can make the introduction or introduce yourself.
- If the lawmaker knows you, keep in regular contact: stay in touch by phone and make a visit once or twice a year.
- Don't forget the staff: get to know them and stay in contact.
- Invite lawmakers to visit your school/attend events.

# Build a Relationship

- Share data and information – especially info specific to your district – or offer briefings on education issues of interest to them
- Look for opportunities to thank them or highlight their work where appropriate – privately or publicly
- If their votes or actions don't reflect your positions, tell them (respectfully) why not

# Communicating with Lawmakers

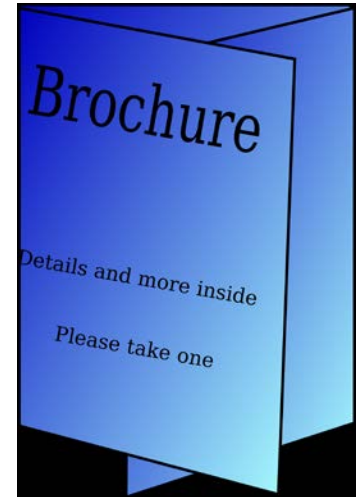
- Do your homework – on the issue itself and on the lawmaker's positions and perceptions
- Keep your communications clear and focused – stick to the message, your ask, and the information you want to convey
- Don't try to cover too many issues in one visit/call
- Share data, but also tell real life, local stories

# Communicating with Lawmakers

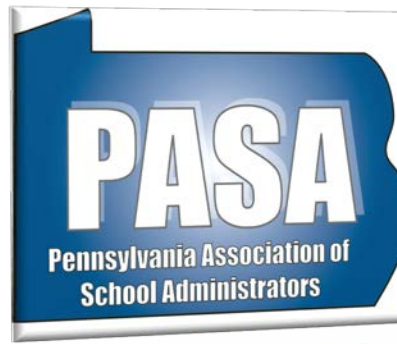
- No “grenade” throwing—be courteous and polite
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, say so, but promise to get back to them with the answer
- Be prepared for:
  - Partisan rhetoric (from either side)
  - Possibility that lawmaker will not have detailed understanding of the issue
  - Longwinded answers that take you off topic

# Communicating with Lawmakers

- Prepare a “leave behind” – make it simple and clear; don’t drown the lawmaker with paper
- Ask the lawmaker or staff to update you on developments
- Follow up with a letter of thanks
- Follow up again later to ask if anything more is needed







*PASA's mission is to develop, support,  
and serve Pennsylvania School Leaders*

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