



**ASCD**  
**Advocacy Guide**



Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
Alexandria, Virginia USA



### **ASCD Public Policy and Communications Contacts**

**For information about legislative issues and working with policymakers**, contact the ASCD Public Policy department:

- E-mail [edadvocates@ascd.org](mailto:edadvocates@ascd.org).
- Call 1-703-575-5608 or 1-800-933-2723, ext. 5608.

**For media inquiries and information about working with the media**, contact the ASCD Communications department:

- E-mail [press@ascd.org](mailto:press@ascd.org).
- Call 1-703-575-8621 or 1-800-933-2723, ext. 8621.

**Educator Advocates** is a grassroots network of ASCD educators who speak out to ensure that education policy supports what is best for students. To join Educator Advocates and have your voice heard at the federal level, visit [www.ascd.org/actioncenter](http://www.ascd.org/actioncenter).

Founded in 1943, the **Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that develops programs, products, and services essential to the way educators learn, teach, and lead. Our 175,000 members in 119 countries are professional educators from all levels and subject areas—superintendents, supervisors, principals, teachers, professors of education, and school board members.

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# ASCD Advocacy Guide



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## Why Advocate?



*“We know what’s right for kids. And if we don’t drive that conversation, who will?”*

*—Valerie Truesdale,  
ASCD President,  
Superintendent,  
Beaufort County  
Schools, Beaufort,  
South Carolina*

Whether it is through education funding, accountability, or teacher quality regulations, education policy affects our schools and students. For too long, these policies have been developed without full consideration of their effect in the classroom. ASCD is working to change that by helping educators engage in effective advocacy. We know that decision makers will continue to implement education policies whether or not we are at the table. It is up to us to help craft policies that support student learning.

### Become an Educator Advocate

The time for advocacy on behalf of students is now, and the voice needed is yours. Without the involvement of educators like you, others will shape the education policy agenda according to their own narrow interests—and make decisions without the critical information you can provide. The consequences of such ill-informed efforts, even when well-intentioned, can be devastating to children and learning. The stakes are simply too high, and the potential too great, for educators not to engage in advocacy efforts.

You may already be involved in efforts to change policies and programs close to home, but your voice must also be heard on a national level. The first step is signing up for ASCD Educator Advocates. When you become an Educator Advocate, you join a grassroots network of ASCD educators who speak out to ensure that education policy supports what is best for students. ASCD will provide the resources to make sure your advocacy time is minimal but your influence significant.

Visit the ASCD Action Center ([www.ascd.org/actioncenter](http://www.ascd.org/actioncenter)) to join Educator Advocates.

### Use This Guide

This guide offers advice for planning an advocacy campaign, communicating with policymakers, making your voice heard, and ensuring your advocacy is effective and efficient. Use the resources in the guide and in the ASCD Action Center ([www.ascd.org/actioncenter](http://www.ascd.org/actioncenter)) to support your efforts and make the most of your time as an advocate. Even if you have only two minutes to spare, these tried-and-true approaches will make sure you are respected and effective as a go-to source for education policy.



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Although some of the resources and tips in this guide are U.S.-based, the basics of effective advocacy are universal. We hope you will take what is helpful to you and tailor the tips and advice to your unique circumstances.

### Tell Us What You Think

Your feedback is strongly encouraged; if you have ideas, suggestions, or questions about the ASCD Advocacy Guide or Educator Advocates, please contact the ASCD Public Policy department by sending a message to [edadvocates@ascd.org](mailto:edadvocates@ascd.org) or by calling 1-703-575-5608 or 1-800-933-2723, ext. 5608.



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# Getting Started



Whether you advocate as an individual or as part of a group, your efforts will benefit from a little planning. Taking action may be as simple as briefly researching an issue and picking up the phone to contact your policymaker. When you have more time or are part of a larger group, you can consider some other steps, such as communicating with your allies, setting your goals, and developing an action plan. Remember that in advocacy, as in teaching, respectful relationships build the foundation for change.

## Research the Issue

Information from constituents is the key to advocacy. Elected officials care about what their constituents have to say. To really make a difference as an advocate, you should be informed and engaged. You do not need to be a congressional expert, nor do you need to understand everything there is to know about all of education. All you have to do is provide insight about the local impact of education issues. By making your voice heard regularly, you can help your elected officials understand which policies work and which ones have a negative effect on schools and students.

The ASCD Web site offers helpful information on many critical concerns, including a section on the ASCD Legislative Agenda ([www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda](http://www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda)) that identifies the Association's top legislative priorities for the year and includes key messages and brief policy papers to help you advocate. As you analyze each education issue, consider the following questions:

- What is the effect of the issue in my community?
- What does this mean to my local school, school district, and students?
- What is the cost of not doing anything on this issue?
- What possible actions can be taken? What are the consequences of these actions?
- Who else cares about this issue in my community?

## Build a Network

As you talk with members of ASCD, your local ASCD affiliate, and your community, you will find allies who support what you are doing and want to help. Consider working with 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 members of 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. Networks are particularly effective when they

- Bring together different constituencies with a common goal.
- Build support and legitimacy for an issue.
- Raise the profile of an issue or group.
- Rally resources to support a cause.

### Communicate with Your Allies

Establishing a network of advocates doesn't stop when members are identified. To support your group, you will need to develop an effective means of communication. The first step is to gather contact information. With each new contact, keep a record of mailing addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and any other information you think will be useful.

Once you have this information, stay informed and stay connected. When the U.S. Congress is in session, Educator Advocates receive regular e-mail updates and alerts informing them when their action can make a difference (visit [www.ascd.org/actioncenter](http://www.ascd.org/actioncenter) to join). You can share this information, as well as the key messages and policy papers included with the ASCD Legislative Agenda ([www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda](http://www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda)), with your allies and others who support sound education policies.

### Set Clear Goals and Reasonable Expectations

With a solid understanding of your education issue and a network of allies, you're ready to set goals for your advocacy efforts. (Note: A great opening goal is simply to introduce yourself or your group to your lawmakers and offer to serve as a resource.) Set reasonable expectations, like a new amendment to establish a pilot program or to offer additional flexibility in using federal resources. Advocacy demands perseverance; dividing your ultimate aim into small, manageable steps will help you stay focused on your immediate goals. You can contact the ASCD Public Policy team at [edadvocates@ascd.org](mailto:edadvocates@ascd.org) for help with this aspect of your work. Remember, changing public policy, especially at the state and federal level, takes time.





*“We need to advocate for the work that we do, for our students, and for how we [should] change education for the 21st century.”*

*—Carlos Viera, District Director, Office of Performance Improvement, Miami-Dade Public Schools, Miami, Florida*

At ASCD, we set goals annually through the ASCD Legislative Agenda. A dedicated group of ASCD members comes together each January to examine the intersection between the current policy climate and ASCD’s positions and advocacy goals. In the first part of this process, ASCD looks at current education policy through three lenses: assess, anticipate, and initiate.

**Assess.** What is currently happening in education policy? Although some of this information can be gleaned from newspaper articles and television, it is also beneficial to ask decision makers, legislators, and their staff members for information about what they are working on. Reaching out helps develop key relationships and tells decision makers that you are serious about wanting to help them. When you convene to set goals, consider asking policymakers or their staff members to speak briefly at your planning meeting.

**Anticipate.** What issues do you anticipate coming up within the next year? This question requires you to look beyond what is happening right now to see what is likely to come in the near future. Look for issues that have garnered a lot of attention; policies that are scheduled for reauthorization; and topics that have been featured in the media and recent research reports as well as at hearings, forums, and other community and national events.

**Initiate.** Now that you have examined what is already being discussed, what’s missing? Is there anything your group feels passionately about that is not likely to be addressed? If so, you may wish to include goals for initiating topics and policies that others have overlooked. It may be more challenging to initiate a new issue, but it is also an excellent way to set your group apart from the crowd.

Once you have assessed current education issues, anticipated what’s to come, and identified the topics and policies worth initiating, you must narrow your list. Prioritizing this list may be the most challenging aspect of setting your advocacy goals, but it is also one of the most important. Overcommitting can result in not accomplishing anything, so focus your efforts by making tough decisions about which priorities are most important to reaching your goals.







In prioritizing your goals, consider the following questions:

- Does this issue align with our mission, values, and beliefs?
- What do we want to accomplish? Why is this important?
- Could students, schools, and learning be hurt or helped by what is proposed?
- Do we have direct experience with this policy?
- Can we make a difference if we get involved?
- Will this topic motivate and mobilize our network?

### Develop a Plan and Take Action

At ASCD, we use the goals illustrated in our legislative agenda to prioritize the content of our action plan. Throughout the year, this plan guides the e-mail updates and alerts we send to our Educator Advocates to inform them when their action can make a difference. Whether you are working as an individual advocate or with a sizeable network, a carefully crafted list of priorities and an initial time line will provide an important road map for action.

When planning your efforts, remember to consider the time line of events that are out of your control. In the United States, for example, several time frames with legislative significance are worth taking into account:

**January:** The president gives his State of the Union address.

**February:** The Executive Budget is released, highlighting the president's priorities for the coming year.

**March:** Congress begins work on the annual budget process. The House and Senate work on budget resolutions to set general spending parameters for the year.

**August:** Congress takes its summer recess. This is a good opportunity to meet with members of Congress in their home states and districts.

**September/October:** Congress targets this time for adjournment. The federal fiscal year begins in October.

**November:** Elections are held on even-numbered years.





Your action plan should first take into account your target audience: the elected officials, media professionals, and community leaders you intend to influence. For each audience, you may need to tailor your message and your communication techniques. The following sections of this ASCD Advocacy Guide present the range of communication strategies you need to consider as you develop your plan.



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## Working with Policymakers



From your local school board to Congress, the goals of your advocacy efforts are likely to require action by a decision-making body. Working with elected officials requires persistence, strong listening skills, and a compelling message.

**Do your homework.** To be an effective voice for students and education, you do not need to be an expert, but it helps to know where policymakers stand on specific bills, as well as education issues in general. If you are a member of ASCD Educator Advocates, we will periodically provide links to Web pages where you can find out how your members of Congress voted on a specific issue. You can also find this information in the ASCD Action Center, by contacting ASCD Public Policy staff, or by looking at the Web sites of individual policymakers and their legislative bodies.

The following Web sites can help you research legislators and bills:

- The ASCD Action Center ([www.ascd.org/actioncenter](http://www.ascd.org/actioncenter)) includes links to contact lawmakers and research legislation.
- The U.S. Senate ([www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)) and the U.S. House of Representatives ([www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)) include links to Web pages for individual members of Congress as well as committees.
- THOMAS (<http://thomas.loc.gov>) provides legislative information from the Library of Congress.
- USA.gov ([www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov)) is the official U.S. government portal to government information, services, and online transactions.

**Establish relationships.** Legislative staff members are a vital part of your elected official's team, so it's important to build a good relationship with them. Staffers advise their legislator on education issues and can be key allies in influencing your elected official. More often, you will work with and through them, because they are the direct link and key voice for the official. Turn to them with questions about what legislation the policymaker is focusing on, what information they need you to provide, and what others who might oppose your cause are saying. In turn, you can help them write their bills and support their work.

**Think locally.** As an advocate for children and education, you have the greatest leverage with your own legislators, rather than with legislators representing other congressional districts or states. Typically, if you want a bill sponsored or an



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amendment made, you should work with your own legislators. You do not have weight if you are not a constituent.

**Begin the process early.** Advocacy should start well before the bill you are concerned about appears in the legislature. A good time to start is between legislative sessions when members often visit their districts. You can and should touch base with legislative staff periodically.

**Know your key messages.** When the opportunity arises to speak with a legislator, journalist, or decision maker, you will not always have a lot of time to make your case. It will be rare that you will be able to make more than three good points, so it pays to choose your most important points in advance. ASCD has developed key messages for each of the priority areas in the ASCD Legislative Agenda ([www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda](http://www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda)) to help you in your efforts.

**Get your issue on the record.** Ask your legislators to cosponsor or support your issue. When legislation is introduced, ask your legislators to submit a statement for the record explaining why the law is necessary. Work with your legislators and supply information about how you can help make the legislation most effective.

**Respect.** Although you may vehemently disagree with a policymaker's stated position on an issue, respect for differing views is a fundamental ingredient of effective advocacy. To gain respect, you must give it; demonstrate it by taking the time to understand diverse opinions.

### Tools for Communicating with Policymakers

As an advocate, you can choose from several techniques for communicating with policymakers, including

- meetings and hearings
- e-mails
- telephone calls
- personal visits
- position papers
- policy briefs
- testimony





Many of these techniques work well in combination. For example, after a telephone call or visit to an elected official's office, you should send a follow-up letter or e-mail of thanks.

### E-mails and Faxes: The Write Stuff

E-mails to elected officials are a key tool for advocates. Given current security concerns, postal mail is significantly slower than in previous years. Many constituents find it faster and more convenient to contact their policymakers through e-mail.

ASCD often provides sample e-mails and talking points that Educator Advocates can personalize and send to their members of Congress through the ASCD Action Center ([www.ascd.org/actioncenter](http://www.ascd.org/actioncenter)). The more positive and substantive your e-mail, the more influential it is likely to be. But keep in mind that policymakers and their staff members do not have a lot of time. Be brief, clear, and specific, and make sure to state your purpose up front.

Use these tips to improve your communication to elected officials:

- Stress the fact that you are a constituent in the subject or first line.
- If your e-mail refers to a specific bill or amendment, identify it in the subject line (e.g., “Constituent Who Supports H.R. 1” or “Support Education Funding in the Budget Resolution”).
- Personalize the e-mail by including the name of your local school or school district and explain how the policy will affect your community.
- State your opinion and your specific request within the first or second sentence.
- Avoid confusing education jargon.
- Demonstrate respect and courtesy, no matter what.
- Include your address; your elected official will want to know that you are a constituent.
- Provide links to one or two articles that relate to the issue or to the ASCD Legislative Agenda or position statement on the issue.
- If you have any personal association with policymakers, remind them. Nothing is more effective in getting a policymaker's attention.



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### Telephone Calls: Convincing Conversation

Telephone calls are a mainstay of education advocacy efforts. Follow these simple steps to effectively advocate by phone:

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*“Anytime we call our representatives, they are more than willing to set appointments with us. What is exciting is that we’re building, over the period of time we’ve worked with them, a personal relationship...so that we become a point of contact even when we leave the Hill. They begin to value the kind of input we can provide for their decision-making process.”*

*—Mary Gunter, Director and Associate Professor, Center for Leadership and Learning, Arkansas Tech University, Russellville, Arkansas*



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- **Preparation.** Before you lift the receiver, jot down a few talking points. Be prepared to leave a voice mail message if necessary.
- **Conversation.** When you telephone a legislator’s office, ask to speak with the legislative aide responsible for covering education issues. If the aide is not available, leave a clear message, including your name and address, with the person who answers the phone. You might begin by saying, “I’m Jane Educator calling from Anytown, and I’d like to leave a message for Congressman Smith.” State the issue you are calling about and what you want your representative to do. Be as brief as possible, recognizing that legislative offices are very busy.
- **Follow-up.** Be sure to thank elected officials and their staff members for their time. A follow-up e-mail is a good opportunity to restate your position and include additional materials, such as links to a position statement or relevant articles. It also helps establish a relationship with the office.

### Meetings and Hearings: The Power of Presence

One way to make certain your voice is heard as an education advocate is to attend meetings and hearings, from school board meetings to face-to-face meetings with your legislator. You may want to travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with your members of Congress, but you do not need to. Members are often interested in meeting with constituents when they visit their districts during the time between sessions. When you meet with a policymaker, consider bringing copies of your position statement and any relevant materials (including your business card) to share with the contacts you may make.

A personal visit can be an effective method of getting the attention of legislators and legislative staff. Remember to follow these basic rules:

- Determine the purpose for your visit. Perhaps you just want to deliver materials and introduce yourself informally. In this case, you may not need to make an appointment, but be prepared should your official want to chat and remember to dress and act professionally.
- For a more formal visit, call ahead and request an appointment with the legislative or staff aide responsible for education issues.
- Although the purpose of the meeting may be to focus on a particular education issue, remember that the long-term connections you are making are equally important.
- Carefully consider the materials you leave with the legislator or aide. Position statements, letters, research articles, and policy briefs may all be appropriate.

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Be sure to include a description of your advocacy network and contact information.

- Always send a thank-you e-mail as a follow-up to a personal visit. Such practices will help you develop regular contact with elected officials.
- If you meet with staff members, make sure you reference their helpfulness and competency in your thank-you e-mail to the official.

### Position Papers and Policy Briefs: Taking a Stand and Backing It Up

Position papers and policy briefs are concise statements of your stand on an education issue and the relevant research. When you need to communicate your stance to decision makers, the media, or other community members, position papers and policy briefs may be helpful tools. It is important to leave a position paper with a decision maker's staff as a record of your visit. And position papers reaffirm the substance and goals of your advocacy to people in your network. Three or four well-conceived and well-written papers might bring your group's name to mind when busy staffers are crafting future legislation.

Effective position papers

- State your position up front.
- Clearly communicate what you want done.
- Provide the background and context of the education issue.
- Are no longer than two pages.
- Identify your group and why the position is important to you.

To help in your efforts, you can share the policy briefs included with the ASCD Legislative Agenda ([www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda](http://www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda)) or use the resources to relate your papers to the Association's legislative priorities.

### Effective Testimony: A Window of Opportunity

Testimony before a committee, board of education, public hearing, or legislative commission is a powerful opportunity. It may take months or years of relationship-building for some advocates to be invited to testify, yet the time allocated for testimony may sometimes be no more than five minutes. Using that brief window of time to the best advantage is critical. If you have the opportunity to provide testimony, include the following:





- An introduction that expresses your interest in the issue.
- A brief definition of the issue.
- A statement and explanation of your position on the issue.
- Rationale for your position and recognition of alternatives.
- A request for support of your position.
- An offer to provide assistance and a thank-you.

Remember to separate information from conclusions and provide evidence to support your claims. Also remember to use plain language that noneducators can understand, and bring multiple copies of your spoken testimony that include your contact information and any supporting graphs, charts, and other carefully selected material. Share these copies with others who are present and with the media.

The questions you most dread may be the first ones you are asked. Prepare answers for the most likely questions and rehearse them in advance. Do not shy away from questions; use them to elaborate on your key messages. Finally, be honest and positive, even in the face of negative questions. “I don’t know, but I’ll get back to you” is a perfectly acceptable answer.



# Working with the Media



Working with the media is an opportunity to spread your message. This section of the guide includes practical how-to tips for communicating with the media, instructions for putting your messages in writing, and an explanation of the different forums you can use to communicate these messages.

For key ASCD messages, a sample news release and op-ed, and other tools, refer to the LEAP Communications Tool Kit ([www.ascd.org/leapcommunicationskit](http://www.ascd.org/leapcommunicationskit)).

## How to Talk with the Media

Keep the following general tips in mind when you have a conversation or interview with any member of the media. Communications tips specific to different types of media outlets are located later in the guide.

### Before the interview

- If a reporter calls to interview you, find out what the reporter is looking for (e.g., in-depth analysis, a few quotes, or background information) and the deadline.
- Become familiar with the media outlet and the reporter's style. Review past coverage by the reporter and the outlet in general.
- Develop and review the two or three key messages or points you want to make.
- Anticipate and prepare responses for both easy and tough questions.

### During the interview

- Use plain English, avoiding education jargon. Answer questions clearly and concisely. Think in 10-second sound bites.
- Remember that you are speaking to the interviewer's audience (viewers or readers) and not the interviewer.
- Stay on message, even if the questions don't directly address the points you want to make. Answer the questions you have the knowledge to answer, but find a way to bridge the conversation back to your main points.
- Use anecdotes, analogies, human interest details, and so forth to connect with the audience and make your points interesting.
- Be honest. It's OK to say, "I don't know."



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- Assume that nothing is off the record.
- If the interview is about to end and you have not made an important point, tell the reporter you would like to make one last point and offer it.

### After the interview

- Thank the reporter for his time.
- Promptly follow-up with additional information or quotes if you promised to do so during the interview or if you forgot to mention something important.

## How to Put Your Message in Writing

Your message will either address news and facts—the who, what, when, where, why, and how—of a situation, or it will convey your opinion. There’s a primary way to convey each type of message.

### News Releases and Media Advisories: Sharing the Facts

A *news release* is a basic component of communicating with the media, and it provides a standard format for relatively quick and efficient dissemination of time-sensitive information about important situations or events. A news release will rarely be published verbatim, but it will inform media coverage. Before you write a release, it’s important to consider whether your information is genuinely newsworthy. There is no value in sending a news release when there is no real news.

### Tips for writing news releases

- Write a succinct headline that conveys your “hook” or key message.
- Put the most compelling information at the top of the release. The first few sentences should provide the who, what, when, where, why, and how. Write your paragraphs in descending order of importance.
- Write clearly and concisely. Keep sentences and paragraphs short. News releases should rarely be longer than one page.
- Include contact information. At least one phone number and e-mail address should appear in the release.
- Date your release.



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When you are holding an event and time is of the essence, you may want to send a *media advisory* instead of a news release. Media advisories are similar to news releases but are limited to a bulleted list of the who, what, when, where, and why of your event. Send your advisory at least one week before your scheduled event. This allows reporters time to plan ahead.

Most reporters prefer to receive news releases and news advisories via e-mail. E-mail is also the least expensive and fastest method of disseminating your news. Just remember to include the release in the body of the e-mail; many newsrooms block e-mail attachments. Refer to the LEAP Communications Tool Kit ([www.ascd.org/leapcommunicationskit](http://www.ascd.org/leapcommunicationskit)) for a sample news release.

### Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor: Publishing Your Opinion

*Opinion editorials*, or *op-eds*, showcase your opinion in the press. The purpose of an op-ed is to persuade the reader, generally in the form of either a direct commentary on a current issue or a rebuttal of a previously published article or op-ed. Unlike news releases, op-eds are published with your byline and focus on your point of view.

#### Tips for writing op-eds

- Take a strong, focused stand on a single issue.
- Provide a fresh, new perspective on the issue. Predictable arguments do not get printed.
- Consider writing an insider's view of your classroom, school, or district.
- Consider writing a case study on a failed program or effort. Provide data on what went wrong, as well as lessons learned.
- Communicate your opinion clearly and succinctly.
- Establish a clear connection between your view and the interests of the reader. Tell your audience what's in it for them.
- Concisely and unemotionally examine and refute the main opposing point of view.
- Include a call to action or outline recommendations.
- Following your conclusion, add one or two sentences about yourself and your expertise.





Op-eds, especially those published in newspapers or magazines, are often written by prominent individuals and tend to carry the voice of authority or expertise. *Letters to the editor* can be an easier way to get your opinion published. They're also ideal if you have an opinion that can be summarized in a few paragraphs and is a direct response to a previously published article.

Look up your chosen publication's word limit, format requirements, and submission guidelines for op-eds and letters to the editor. Refer to the LEAP Communications Tool Kit ([www.ascd.org/leapcommunicationskit](http://www.ascd.org/leapcommunicationskit)) for a sample op-ed.

### How to Spread Your Message

Countless forums and media outlets, from mainstream newspapers to community events, are available to help you communicate your message. The key, however, is to be targeted and strategic about getting your message into the right hands.

#### Identifying the Right Media Organizations and Reporters

A good place to start is the Media Guide section of ASCD's Action Center ([www.capwiz.com/ascd/dbq/media](http://www.capwiz.com/ascd/dbq/media)), which allows you to search for specific media organizations and members of the media. But perhaps the guide's most useful feature is its local media search, where you enter your ZIP code to find local media outlets, such as newspapers, political publications, television and radio stations, online services, magazines, and more. You can access general contact information for each outlet, as well as obtain contact information for specific reporters.

You can also use the ASCD Media Guide to identify reporters who focus on the topic you want to communicate about—most likely education or education policy. It should be noted that the Media Guide is only a starting point. Reporters often switch beats or organizations. Before contacting a reporter or sending a news release, check the media organization's Web site and its recent coverage to ensure that you have identified the right person and have the most up-to-date contact information. You should also review the reporter's recent coverage to make sure your news is relevant.

#### Print

Regional or local newspapers and education trade publications are key types of print media outlets for disseminating your message.





### Tips for contacting *regional/local newspapers*

- Get to know your local education reporters. Who writes opinion columns, reports on local districts and schools, and covers education news with a national scope?
- Target those reporters whose past coverage best matches your message. When you e-mail your news release or media advisory, briefly explain why you think your story would be of interest.
- Keep your communications to the reporter short and to-the-point. You don't have to include a personal or tailored note with your news release or advisory, but if you do, keep it to one paragraph.
- Make sure your e-mail has a short, catchy, and to-the-point subject line.
- If you don't hear from the reporter within a day or two, it's OK to follow up with a phone call. But don't call more than once and keep your phone introduction or message as succinct and on-topic as your written communication.

Follow the same tips for contacting reporters for *education or policy trade publications*. Just remember that since these publications focus on the education or policy industries, their reporters will have more nuanced beats. An education trade publication might have one reporter who covers school construction issues, another who covers the teaching force, and another who covers science education.

### Sample education trades

- *Education Week*: [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org)
- *District Administration*: [www.districtadministration.com](http://www.districtadministration.com)
- *Edutopia Magazine*: [www.edutopia.org/magazine](http://www.edutopia.org/magazine)
- *Scholastic's Administrator Magazine*: [www.scholastic.com/administrator](http://www.scholastic.com/administrator)
- *Tech & Learning Magazine*: [www.techlearning.com/content/about/tl\\_current.php](http://www.techlearning.com/content/about/tl_current.php)

Newspapers and trade publications typically have an online component, and their Web sites are a great place to identify reporters, get contact information, and read recent coverage. The relationship between print and online editions varies across publications, but usually an education reporter will write for both the print and online editions. You may want to look into whether a publication has an online-only column, discussion forum, or blog that is an appropriate place for you to communicate your message. See the online media section in this guide for more information.





## Broadcast

*Television* appearances offer an unparalleled opportunity for education advocates to communicate their messages to wide audiences with a sense of immediacy. On television, you essentially become the embodiment of your message. Your words and appearance will be associated with your cause.

### Tips for communicating your message on television

- Dress in a subtle manner. Loud colors, patterns, or accessories will distract viewers from focusing on your key message.
- Before you go on the air, practice how you will deliver your key points.
- It's OK to pause briefly before you respond to a question.
- Be aware of your nonverbal communication, particularly your gestures. Assume you are on camera at all times, from all angles. Make an effort to appear to be a good listener when other people are speaking.
- Answer questions in 10-second sound bites.
- Smile.

On *radio* programs, your words—and your voice itself—assume great significance.

### Tips for communicating your message on the radio

- Tune in to the radio station to become familiar with the style, format, and views of the host.
- Practice how you will deliver your key points.
- Answer questions in 10-second sound bites.
- If you are a featured guest on a call-in program, listen carefully to callers and refer to them by name when responding to questions.

## Online Media

The dynamics of communicating messages and sharing information online have evolved as online media tools have become more ubiquitous, sophisticated, and targeted. Social networking sites and blogs have made it possible to deliver content directly to online audiences, instead of forcing audiences to come to you for content. In other words, the focus is on pushing information out instead of pulling audiences in.

*Blogs* in particular are key vehicles for sharing your message online. Whether they are hosted by an organization or an individual, blogs serve a variety of purposes. Some





focus on national education policy, while others have a more localized scope. Blogs like Inservice ([www.ascd.org/blog](http://www.ascd.org/blog)), the ASCD blog, allow users to comment and join the discussion. Others allow only the author of the blog to comment. Blogs also vary with regard to the objectivity and balance of the information posted.

### Tips for communicating your message on blogs

- Consider the experience, objective, and focus of a blogger when deciding which blogs to follow and contribute to.
- Become familiar with a blog before communicating your message to its author. Regularly read the blogger's posts and comment when appropriate.
- Do not "spam" blogs by submitting comments that push your message but do not add to the online discussion or the focus of the blog. Your comments should be a valid contribution to the conversation.
- When appropriate, e-mail bloggers with interesting and relevant news and information. If you send a press release, preface it with a short note about why you think the news is relevant to the blog.

### Sample education blogs

- ASCD's Inservice: [www.ascd.org/blog](http://www.ascd.org/blog)
- *Education Week*: [www.edweek.org/ew/section/blogs](http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/blogs)
- This Week in Education: [www.scholasticadministrator.typepad.com](http://www.scholasticadministrator.typepad.com)
- Eduwonk: [www.eduwonk.com](http://www.eduwonk.com)
- Joanne Jacobs: <http://joannejacobs.com>
- Edspresso: [www.edspresso.com](http://www.edspresso.com)
- Flypaper: [www.edexcellence.net/flypaper](http://www.edexcellence.net/flypaper)



Remember, you don't have to stick to blogs with a national focus. Some of the most relevant blogs for your news might focus on local education issues. *The Dallas Morning News* education blog, Dallas ISD (<http://dallasisdblog.dallasnews.com>), is a good example of a district-focused blog. You can also tap into teacher blogs if you want to gain the support of practitioners or have a message that would resonate well with educators. A Shrewdness of Apes (<http://shrewdnessofapes.blogspot.com>) and It's Not All Flowers and Sausages (<http://itsnotallflowersandsausages.blogspot.com>) are two examples of blogs by educators.





*Podcasts* are another way to communicate your message. The Learning First Alliance, a partnership of leading education associations, has a hybrid blog and podcast called Public School Insights ([www.publicschoolinsights.org](http://www.publicschoolinsights.org)), which features interviews with a wide range of experts from the National Teacher of the Year to author Dave Eggers. Other podcasts, such as MommyCast ([www.mommymcast.com](http://www.mommymcast.com)), are geared toward parents. You can also create and host your own podcast using BlogTalk Radio ([www.blogtalkradio.com](http://www.blogtalkradio.com)).

*Online chats* are a great forum for online discussions, debates, and question-and-answer sessions with experts on a given topic. *Education Week* hosts two to three chats a month ([www.edweek.org/chat](http://www.edweek.org/chat)) with expert guests on a wide range of education topics. Sometimes the chat focuses on the topic of an *Education Week* article or project; at other times, the online discussions highlight issues not addressed in the publication's regular coverage.

*Social networking sites*, such as Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) and ParentsConnect ([www.parentsconnect.com](http://www.parentsconnect.com)), are a good way to push out information and messages to your target audience. On Facebook, organizations can create a group or page to reach online audiences and cultivate supporters and advocates. Just remember that you'll get the most value from social networking tools if you work hard to deliver fresh content and build your online audience. People won't regularly visit your page and become engaged if you simply build a Facebook page and never update it.

### Sample Facebook pages

- ED in '08: [www.facebook.com/pages/Strong-American-Schools-ED-in-08/9805398497](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Strong-American-Schools-ED-in-08/9805398497)
- Eduwonk: [www.facebook.com/pages/Eduwonkcom/14597313691](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Eduwonkcom/14597313691)
- *Education Week*: [www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Week/5887538795](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Week/5887538795)



### Community Outreach

The media is not the only audience for your news and messages. You may want to conduct community outreach to inform the public about your ideas and efforts, engage the public in your work, or both. The specific members of the community you decide to target may vary depending on your objectives and could range from policymakers to parents.

One way to promote dialogue among diverse groups is to hold a community event. Before planning an event, you must first determine your objectives. Are you trying to



influence? Educate? Are you putting forth your own point of view or pulling together a platform on which various points of view are discussed? You need to define the purpose of the meeting to determine its structure, who to invite, and where to hold the event.

Refer to ASCD's Whole Child Community Conversations Project guides ([www.ascd.org/communityconversations](http://www.ascd.org/communityconversations)) for more in-depth information about how to facilitate community conversations among various stakeholders.



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## Additional Resources



- ASCD Web site: [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)
- ASCD Action Center: [www.ascd.org/actioncenter](http://www.ascd.org/actioncenter)
- ASCD Legislative Agenda: [www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda](http://www.ascd.org/legislativeagenda)
- ASCD LEAP Communications Tool Kit: [www.ascd.org/leapcommunicationskit](http://www.ascd.org/leapcommunicationskit)
- ASCD Fact Sheet: [www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/about%20ascd/factsheet.pdf](http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/about%20ascd/factsheet.pdf)
- ASCD's Whole Child Initiative: [www.wholechildeducation.org](http://www.wholechildeducation.org)
- ASCD Whole Child Community Conversations Project: [www.ascd.org/communityconversations](http://www.ascd.org/communityconversations)
- ASCD Whole Child Resolution Tool Kit: [www.wholechildeducation.org/blackboard/resolutiontoolkit](http://www.wholechildeducation.org/blackboard/resolutiontoolkit)



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## About ASCD

Founded in 1943, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that develops programs, products, and services essential to the way educators learn, teach, and lead. Our 175,000 members in 119 countries are professional educators from all levels and subject areas—superintendents, supervisors, principals, teachers, professors of education, and school board members.

As our name reflects, ASCD was initially envisioned to represent “curriculum” and “supervision” issues. We now provide expert and innovative solutions in professional development, capacity building, and educational leadership.

## ASCD as an Advocate

Since its inception, ASCD has built on a core set of values and beliefs in support of the whole child. We believe student success is dependent on academic knowledge, physical and emotional health, engagement, and school and community support. We advocate for sound education policies and best practices to ensure that each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Because we represent a broad spectrum of educators, we are able to focus on policies and professional practice within the context: “Is it good for the children?”

## ASCD as an Expert Source and Content Provider

ASCD is known throughout the profession for identifying education trends and translating research into practice. We are an award-winning publisher of books, periodicals, and a variety of online and multimedia products. ASCD’s flagship, award-winning publication, *Educational Leadership*, is recognized as a balanced and reliable source of information on trends, research, and professional practices in education.

ASCD’s professional development resources, programs, and conferences focus on specific issues such as differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and health and learning that show promise in improving student achievement. We provide educators with the tools they need to implement best practices at the district, school, and classroom levels.

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