

Please Engage in Grassroots Advocacy in 2021—Your Voice Matters!

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The 2021 budget session of the Indiana General Assembly is just a few weeks away and will commence on January 4, 2021. The two essential duties of the state legislature will be to adopt the 2021-2023 biennial state budget and redistrict legislative boundaries based on the 2020 U.S. decennial census. Like most sessions, we anticipate that K-12 education policy will remain a hot topic, too. In the budget session of 2019, we tracked a whopping 193 bills, and in just the last three years, 116 new education laws have been passed!

The 2021 session will present challenges to K-12 public education—such as proposals to expand school choice programs—as well as opportunities to support pro-public education agenda items. Your voice will be important to influence the outcomes on key legislation. Please consider how you can optimally engage in the grassroots advocacy process to have your voice heard. When state lawmakers hear from school board members, that gets their attention.

Regarding the ongoing debate on school choice, it is incumbent that we remind legislators that **PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE THE SCHOOLS OF CHOICE OF HOOSIER PARENTS!** Per the most recent Student Transfer Report from the Indiana Department of Education, 47% of all parents who exercise choice choose another traditional public school, while only 30% opt for a charter school, and 23% seek a Choice Scholarship voucher.

Legislative Action Network

While your ISBA lobby team strives to be in the right place at the right time, our voices are more effective when our efforts are complemented by a troop of school board members participating in the **Legislative Action Network**, ISBA's formal grassroots advocacy program. The **LAN** is designed to help unify and mobilize “the voice” of school board members and increase State House visibility. Through this program, we provide you with the information, resources, strategies, and guidance to engage in the grassroots advocacy process.

The program to cultivate and coordinate the localized grassroots advocacy efforts typically goes through each school board's designated **legislative liaison**, although we encourage all board members to engage in grassroots advocacy. To become your school corporation's Legislative Action Network Liaison, please have your superintendent send your name and preferred contact information to Talia Bynm at: tbynm@isba-ind.org.

For more information on ISBA's Legislative Action Network, click [HERE](#).

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Top 10 Tips of Effective Grassroots Advocacy

Ultimately, our collective success during the 2021 session will hinge on the degree to which school board members engage in grassroots advocacy. To help ease your comfort in fulfilling this role, here are some helpful tips to consider:

- ▶ **Tip #1: Research your legislators' backgrounds, committee assignments and voting records on education issues. The best source for this information is the Indiana General Assembly website and reading the pages and biographies of the individual members.**
- ▶ **Tip #2: Develop relationships with your legislators by routinely visiting, writing and calling. Let them know you are a constituent. Take notes about them to assist you with future conversations with them.**
- ▶ **Tip #3: Don't overdo your lobbying. Use ISBA talking points. Clearly and quickly explain your opposition or support for the issue you are contacting them about.**
- ▶ **Tip #4: Show respect. Be positive. Remember to thank legislators for pro-public education votes and support of the ISBA legislative priorities. Conclude each communication with an expression of gratitude for their time.**
- ▶ **Tip #5: Lobby with your real-life experience. It's your most persuasive tool. Use local examples.**
- ▶ **Tip #6: Set priorities. When everything is important, nothing is important. Know your "ask" and focus your conversation around it.**
- ▶ **Tip #7: Shore up lobbying allies from your community to demonstrate broad support; collaborate with others.**
- ▶ **Tip #8: Don't forget the media. Getting your message out to the press – letters-to-the editor, news releases, etc. – can influence your legislators and public opinion.**
- ▶ **Tip #9: Be sensitive to partisan politics, but always try to come across as nonpartisan. In politics, there are no permanent allies and no permanent adversaries.**
- ▶ **Tip #10: Be reasonable and consider compromise on contentious issues. Remember, there are more than 1,000 bills that are introduced each session, and everyone thinks their issues are most important—many people and issues vie for the attention of legislators. Sometimes, simply informing legislators on your position will pay long-term dividends whether you immediately persuade them to change their position or not.**

For essential information that you need to track the 2021 session of the Indiana General Assembly, please see the resources available on ISBA's Legislative Services page at: <https://www.isba-ind.org/legislative.html>

See you in 2021!