Practicing Legislative Advocacy as a School Counselor

Stephen Kennedy
NCSCA Government Relations Chair
sdkenned@ncsu.edu

North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012
What is Legislative Advocacy?

Legislative advocacy involves working with lawmakers, who make decisions that affect our students’ wellbeing.

- Students, families, and counselors can experience stress due to cuts in funding.
- Laws can directly impact a client’s life, such as laws that affect undocumented students (Brubaker & Goodman, 2012).
- Sweeney (2012) suggested that counselors have a professional responsibility to educate lawmakers about the work we do.

North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012
What Are Legislators Like?

Most politicians have similar characteristics:

- Politicians hold public office to help others.
- Politicians are good learners, but do not know everything.
- Politicians have many demands on their time.
- Politicians have limited resources.
- Politicians like to be thanked.
- Politicians love good press.
- Politicians are always running for office.

(ACA, 2007)
Meeting with Legislators in Person

Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way to communicate with legislators.

You can identify the lawmakers who represent you on the following websites:

- [http://capwiz.com/counseling](http://capwiz.com/counseling) (U.S.)
- [http://www.ncleg.net](http://www.ncleg.net) (North Carolina)

If a lawmaker is unavailable on Legislative Day, you can request to meet with a legislative assistant instead.

(ACA, 2012)

North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012
Strategies for Meeting in Person

Your meeting may be more effective if you:

- Make an appointment.
- State that you are a constituent.
- Explain the reason for the meeting and emphasize that you will need fewer than 30 minutes.
- Limit the number of issues you discuss and refer to bills by name and number.
- Bring supporting materials to accompany your presentation and provide copies.  

(ACA, 2007)
The second most effective method for contacting lawmakers is to send a personalized postal letter or email message. Form emails are much less useful.

Letters should be addressed appropriately:

The Honorable [FULL NAME]
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [LAST NAME]:

(ACA, 2012)
Strategies for Letters & Emails

Your message may have a greater impact if you:

- Identify yourself as a constituent.
- Limit the letter to one page if possible.
- Ask the legislator to do something specific, such as vote for a particular bill.
- Discuss how the issue is affecting people in your community.
- Share personal stories related to the issue.
- Identify disagreements with the lawmaker but are polite and avoid criticism.

(ACA, 2007)
Building the Relationship

Legislative advocacy is most effective if counselors create ongoing relationships with lawmakers:

- After every meeting, record what happened: who you met with, the issues you discussed, and the lawmaker’s response.
- Write a thank you letter that summarizes the points you made.
- Send the legislator a copy of a photo you took or a newsletter that mentions the meeting.
- Contact the legislator again and invite her or him to continue the conversation.  

(ACA, 2007)

North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012
ACA’s “Call to Action!” website (capwiz.com/counseling) can help you email your U.S. senator or representative.

- Remember to personalize the email.

Additional advocacy resources are available at:

- The Legislative Affairs subgroup on ASCA SCENE (schoolcounselor.groupsite.com)
- The National Center for School Counselor Advocacy website (advocacy.collegeboard.org)
- CSI’s webpage on advocacy (csi-net.org)

North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012
Our 2011-2012 agenda, based on a 2010 survey of NCSCA members at our fall conference, focuses on:

- Preserving school counselor positions
- Protection of counselors’ time
- The student to counselor ratio
- Pay scale
- Testing coordinator positions
Preserving Positions

Economic conditions have put our jobs in jeopardy.

- In 2011, Governor Perdue suggested a 5% cut for Instructional Support Personnel, which includes school counselors, social workers, and media specialists.
- The NC Senate and the NC House included the same cut in the final budget.
- Discretionary funding cuts have caused some districts to lose additional positions over the past several years.

North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012
# Student to School Counselor Ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>183:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>232:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASCA Recommends</strong></td>
<td><strong>250:1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>318:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>344:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Carolina</strong></td>
<td><strong>385:1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>390:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>771:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>810:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012
NCSCA Legislative Agenda

Our 2011-2012 agenda, based on a 2010 survey of NCSCA members at our fall conference, focuses on:

- Preserving school counselor positions
- Protection of counselors’ time
- The student to counselor ratio
- Pay scale
- Testing coordinator positions

North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012
References


North Carolina School Counselor Association, 2012