Advocacy Toolkit

A Guide to Effective Education Advocacy

Maryland Association of Boards of Education

Serving & Supporting Boards of Education Since 1957

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FORWARD

The mission of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education is to support local boards in fulfilling their multiple roles through professional development, advocacy, and member services. MABE is pleased to provide this Advocacy Toolkit to prepare local boards of education and individual board members to engage in successful advocacy efforts on behalf of students in local school systems and throughout the state. As one of the three core areas of services provided by MABE, the goal of the association's governmental relations program is to serve our members by being advocates for public schools, for local board governance of education, and for the continued leadership and legal authority of school boards. Importantly, MABE firmly believes that a hallmark of a successful advocacy program is to prepare its members to be effective advocates, confidently employing the knowledge and tools developed through participation in the association's legislative, legal and policy services, and professional development programs.

This Advocacy Toolkit is intended to complement board and board member efforts by providing a portable guide to assist in lobbying local, state, and federal officials on behalf of Maryland's outstanding public schools and students.

WHY IS ADVOCACY SO IMPORTANT?

- Board member service is grounded in a commitment to ensuring that all students receive a high quality public education.
- Board members serve a prominent leadership role in governing school systems; demanding an understanding of what is necessary to provide, sustain, and improve the quality of public education.
- At a time when competing messages are being heard, the voice of those representing the best interests of public school students also must be heard.
- Board members must engage in adopting annual budgets based on the state, local, and federal funding provided, and be adept at seeking sufficient revenues to support outstanding schools.
- Board members are in a unique position to advocate for the programs and resources for successful local school systems, and to collaborate on behalf of all students attending Maryland's 24 local school systems.

DOES ADVOCACY BY BOARD MEMBERS REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes, it does!

- Board members are in a unique position to educate and influence the legislative process.
- Board members are able to provide information about education policy from a local perspective.
- As the policy makers for the school districts, board members play an integral role in conjunction with state and federal legislators, and the state board to carry out the mission of educating all students.
- Through MABE's Legislative and Federal Relations Network committees, the unity of 24 local school boards lends strength to our voice in the legislative process, ensuring that the governor, Maryland General Assembly, Maryland State Board of Education, and congressional delegation turn to MABE to help determine what is best for Maryland's 850,000 public school children.

I. BECOMING AN ADVOCATE

BECOMING INFORMED

"Lobbying" is defined as an organized attempt to influence decision makers on a particular issue. Therefore, a critical first step in effective advocacy is "getting organized" by becoming more informed about both the policy issues and the legislative arena in which they are being debated and decided. It is important that board members are informed on key policy issues, and have access to more specific and detailed information as needed. Board members typically bring a wealth of professional knowledge, whether from the parent advocate, business leader, or retired educator's perspective. Complementing existing strengths through preparation on specific issues makes for a more confident and well-rounded advocate.

There are many resources available to help build a working knowledge of the issues that impact public education:

MABE RESOURCES

The Advocacy section of MABE's website has a wealth of information:

- MABE's Legislative Positions & Priorities
- Priority Issues & Updates providing information and resources on current issues
- Bill testimony and correspondence for the current legislative session
- Legislative session summaries and presentations on priority issues
- *Calls to Action*, including talking points and sample letters to legislators and newspapers
- Primers on MABE's legislative process and lobbying
- MABE's electronic publications including the *GreenSheet* state legislative update, and the *Monitor* newsletter for Maryland State Board of Education meetings
- Direct links to Maryland's congressional delegation and federal advocacy center of the National School Boards Association

MABE has a Facebook page to keep users informed of association news and local, state, and federal issues and activities. (www.facebook.com/pages/Maryland-Association-of-Boards-of-Education)

MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOURCES

The Maryland General Assembly's website (www.mlis.state.md.us) is an excellent resource for session information, legislator contact information, House and Senate agendas and procedures, hearing schedules, and information on bill status.

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESOURCES

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) website (www.marylandpublicschools.org) is an excellent resource for information on MSDE divisions and programs; the state board's meeting calendar, agendas and minutes, and legal opinions; and MSDE publications such as the annual Fact Book, Directory, and reports on numerous priority issues.

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION (NSBA) RESOURCES

NSBA's website has a wealth of public education information from the national perspective, including the Advocacy Action Plan, in-depth background on pending federal budget and policy issues, and email alerts to members of Congress.

The NSBA produced *American School Board Journal* magazine is an excellent source of education articles and news, along with their *School Board News Today* website. NSBA's Center for Public Education website provides policy analysis from the local board perspective.

OTHER RESOURCES

Education Week's magazine and website (www.edweek.org) also are excellent sources of the latest news in public education.

Effective advocates also stay abreast of local, state, and national education news by seeking out a wide range of information and diverse opinion from newspapers, magazines, and television news shows.

KNOWING YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Whether it is the state legislators in Annapolis, local county executives, mayors, commissioners and council members, or U.S. Senators and Representatives in Washington, D.C., it is important to be familiar with elected officials and the roles they play regarding public education. Boards of education typically do, and certainly should, conduct legislative meetings with local, state, and federal elected officials. Most common are annual meetings with state delegations to review and discuss legislative priorities, and more frequent meetings with local officials focusing on funding issues.

II. ADVOCACY TOOLS

All professions have “tools of the trade” that assist in doing the work required. Board members as advocates should become well acquainted with the tools available to prepare and assist them in speaking and writing effectively on behalf of public education.

Advocacy tools include items such as talking points, written and oral testimony, correspondence (snail mail or email), meetings (formal or impromptu), and conversations (in person or on the telephone – one hour or one minute). Most importantly, the sharing of information as these tools are being employed is, in itself, an essential tool of the advocacy trade.

MABE provides an array of advocacy tools for local boards and board members. Each year the Legislative Committee adopts a set of legislative position statements which provide brief background information and positions (pro and con) on major issue areas. These areas include state education funding, school safety, collective bargaining, charter schools, and local governance authority. MABE staff writes and uploads to the website written testimony on dozens of bills impacting public education, again providing concise issue analysis and positions being advocated, e.g. Support, Oppose, or Support with Amendments.

The *GreenSheet* legislative updates provide talking points and sample letters to legislators and the media on priority issues; and *Calls to Action* indicate the specific timing, tools, and audience.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

- Keep it simple – most issues can be explained, and a position stated, in only a few sentences.
- Use the tool that works for you – call, write a letter, email, or schedule a meeting.
- Speak up to be heard on key public education issues – actions and inactions count.
- Set priorities – when everything is important, nothing is important.
- Be direct – make specific requests for specific positions and actions.
- Keep it local – highlight the pros or cons of legislation on the local school system.
- Be a team player – be sure that your advocacy efforts conform to your local board's policies and protocols.
- Join forces – remind legislators of any association, coalition, or other stakeholder support for your position.
- Be an educator – invite elected officials to visit local schools to showcase successful programs.
- State the positive – be enthusiastic and courteous. In politics, there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies.
- Say thank you – remember to thank each of the elected officials for their time and their position or action on issues where there is agreement.
- Follow up – be sure to provide any information offered or requested.
- Share your experience – your fellow board members, boards, MABE, and our allies can benefit from what you've learned.
- Relax! Effective advocates do not need to be polished, professional lobbyists.

CONTACTING ELECTED OFFICIALS

Regularly contacting legislators and developing a relationship with them assists them in making well-informed decisions regarding education. Ideally, legislators will reciprocate by seeking your input as issues are being considered. Letters, emails, and telephone calls are all effective tools when used correctly. Given the volume of letters and calls a legislator receives, it is important to focus your advocacy efforts. One approach is to meet annually prior to legislative session to review all major issue areas and priority positions, with targeted meetings and requests for actions during session. This makes the consideration of local board positions part of the annual process, and makes targeted lobbying actions stand out.

TESTIMONY = TALKING POINTS

MABE testimony, on bills pending in Annapolis, Capitol Hill, or presented to the state board on pending policy or regulations, should be all that is needed to advocate in person, over the phone, or via email. MABE testimony during session provides the association's position (Support, Oppose, or Support with Amendments), describes what the bill does in a sentence or two, explains MABE's position in a paragraph or two, and concludes by urging a specific committee vote (Favorable, Favorable with Amendments, or Unfavorable). MABE testimony on state board matters is likely to include more policy analysis, but should provide opening and closing paragraphs that anyone can use to explain and advocate our position.

MAKE A PHONE CALL

Phone calls are an effective and fast way to communicate with a legislator, especially when a critical vote is coming up. Sometimes an in-depth conversation with a legislator is possible; at other times, a call may simply be tallied by staff, and the legislators are given counts of constituents for and against the particular issue. Be sure to let staff know you are a board member, as the legislator may take your call.

Did you know?
In a legislative directory, you may see a four digit extension for your delegate or senator. Use either 410-841 (Baltimore/Annapolis) or 301-858 (Washington Suburban) before these extensions to reach your elected official. During the interim, call the local office at the number provided on the member's individual webpage.

When calling during a legislative session:

- Ask to speak with the senator or representative, but be prepared to discuss the issue with a legislative assistant.
- Give your name, title, and the name of the school board on which you serve.
- Focus the call on one issue or bill and, if possible, identify the bill by number. Briefly state what position you wish the legislator to take, and be prepared to offer a rationale based on local impact.
- Always ask what position the legislator will be taking on the bill or issue.

When calling during the interim:

- Give your name, title, and the name of the school board on which you serve.
- You may have to schedule a time to speak with the legislator; remember, most legislators have full-time jobs during the interim.
- Focus your conversation on one or two top priorities, remembering that the immediate goal is to introduce yourself and offer yourself as a resource for the legislator on education issues.

WRITE A LETTER

While a slower method of communication, letters remain an effective tool in advocacy. Legislators often are heard appreciating the time and effort it takes to write a letter.

When writing, keep the following in mind:

- Focus on one issue or bill per letter and identify the bill by name and number.
- Express your point of view and explain why the legislator should be supportive; be brief and courteous.
- Briefly explain the local impact of the legislation – just the facts.
- Request that the legislator take a specific position on the bill.
- Ask them to co-sponsor the bill or to vote for its passage.
- Ask for a response from the legislator.
- When writing an individual letter, use your signature and personal letterhead and state that you are a board member. If it is a collective letter written by the board, have the chair sign it and put it on the board's letterhead. Again, always be sure that your advocacy efforts conform to your local board's positions, policies, and protocols.
- Letters provide a unique opportunity to enclose additional materials such as testimony and resolutions, copies of related correspondence, and the handwritten touch.

Dear Senator Smith:

I am writing as President/Chair of the Smith County Board of Education. On behalf of our school board and our system, I urge you to support SB 1234, which will provide adequate and stable funding for Maryland's public schools.

With the enactment of SB 1234 our school system will be able to . . . [Insert local information].

Thank you for your continued support for Maryland's outstanding public schools. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe
President
Smith County
Board of Education
410.301.1234
jdoe@smithcounty.org

MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Meeting in person with a legislator, member of the state board, or key staff person, is the most effective way to share the board's position and influence legislation. Visit state leaders in Annapolis or federal legislators in Washington, D.C., or meet with them when they are in the district. During legislative session, legislators often hold town hall meetings in their districts or attend other community functions. Also consider inviting a legislator or state board member to visit a school in your system to tour facilities or see programs in action.

HOW TO SCHEDULE MEETINGS

- Write or call the legislator's office and ask to schedule a meeting. State the subject(s) to be discussed and the time needed. Most meetings last 15 to 20 minutes, although they can last longer, especially if a group or coalition of people is included.
- Depending on the issue, arrange to make a visit along with several other board members, educators or community members to demonstrate broad support for your position. Let the legislator's office know who will be attending the meeting.
- Call MABE's office to advise that a meeting has been scheduled, as there are often details and background information that MABE can provide.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

- Call the legislator's assistant to discuss issues in advance of the meeting and afterwards.
- Hold a pre-meeting with everyone who will be lobbying to make sure there is consensus on agenda and positions. Decide in advance who will discuss which points so that the meeting runs smoothly.
- Be concise and focus on just a few issues or bills. Remember, the legislator may not be familiar with the bill, so be prepared to educate.
- Provide brief anecdotal evidence of how this issue affects the school district, and therefore the legislator's constituents.
- Ask directly for the legislator's support. If legislators are supportive, ask that they lobby other legislators to support the position. If they disagree, express respectful disappointment, and if possible, rebut their argument. Be courteous – there will always be other issues to agree on in the future.
- Always provide a concise, one page fact sheet or letter describing your position to be left with the legislator as a reminder of the issues and the visit.
- After the meeting, write a letter to thank legislators for their time and reinforce your position. This is also a good opportunity to address any questions asked or to provide additional information.
- Contact MABE and let us know how the legislator responded to the issues.

TIPS FOR GOOD MEDIA RELATIONS

- Identify the spokesperson. Generally, the board president partners with the superintendent as the official voices of advocacy for the school system.
- Stay local. One strong article in a hometown newspaper may prove more effective than one in a large metropolitan daily.
- Forward positive stories to legislators, coalition partners, and other decision makers. An article can have a long life.
- Don't forget local news outlets - school system, district, and community college newsletters, publications, radio, and cable programs.
- Don't just say it - show it. A demonstration or real-life testimonial goes a long way toward illustrating a point.
- Keep it focused. There are many issues, but stick to one at a time to make sure the most important point is covered.
- Put news media relations in your legislative advocacy policy. Media relations should be a year-round function - part of the "official" function of your district or education agency in its legislative advocacy role.
- Take advantage of all news media outlets. Legislative offices may read newspapers most often, but radio and television have a powerful impact on public opinion and should not be overlooked.
- Build news media relationships. Get to know the education reporters and take the time to meet with editorial boards.
- Stick to the facts and never exaggerate. If necessary, get back to reporters after finding the right answer.

USING THE MEDIA

Never underestimate the power of the press. Not only does it help shape public opinion, it can be one of the most powerful advocacy tools. Legislators look to the news media to “take a pulse” on what is important to their constituents. If the news media is effectively educated, issues are more likely to get accurate coverage.

WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND GUEST OPINIONS

Boards of education, speaking with one voice, often use letters to the editor and opinion editorials (op-eds), to speak out on an issue, respond to an article, or state a position. Using the local newspaper often has a larger impact than attempting to get published in the larger outlets. Both MABE and NSBA have sample pieces on key issues.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE LETTERS AND GUEST COLUMNS

- Be brief and focus on one issue. If the article is too long, the newspaper may edit out some important facts. The average op-ed is usually longer than a letter-to-the-editor and is between 500 and 750 words.
- For a letter to the editor, refer to a recent event or article that has appeared in the newspaper and include the article’s date and title.
- When applicable, close your letter or op-ed by asking readers to contact their elected officials or other policymakers about the issue.
- Give your address, school system, and phone number so the newspaper can verify authorship.
- Send your published letter to the editor or op-ed to your legislators.

SHARING INFORMATION

In effective advocacy, it is important to share information with your board and community.

- Formalize legislative advocacy on your board by creating a standing agenda item for legislative updates on local, state, and federal news – and not only during session. Use this time to update your board and, by extension, your community on the implementation of recent legislation (unfunded mandate or beneficial program), and report on your contacts with legislators.

- Ask to speak to civic and community groups on issues of importance to education. School board members are community leaders and can have a great influence on the community's attitudes and opinions.

- Contact MABE to share information and experiences from local delegation meetings, articles in the local press, and any suggestions to benefit the association's lobbying efforts.

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III. ADVOCACY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship building, especially with elected officials, is the cornerstone of successful community advocacy. Public schools do not operate in isolation. Actions of the county government (executives, mayors, commissioners, council members) and local agencies can have a significant effect on your school system, especially if those actions take place in “silos.”

Think about the many local government decisions that can impact your system: planning and zoning, growth management, housing developments (age-restricted, multi-family, etc.), the location of sidewalks or bike paths, water and sewer systems, cable access, recreation and parks initiatives, and transportation policies (bus routes). Successful school boards become informed and involved in these decision-making processes to ensure coordinated planning.

SUGGESTIONS

- Meet on a regularly scheduled basis with county officials to discuss areas of mutual interest. These meetings should extend beyond the normal meetings taking place during budget season.
- Convene an annual “summit” of local officials to share current issues and projections for future challenges and opportunities.
- Take advantage of opportunities to invite local elected officials to the schools – celebrations, programs, student shows, and Back-to-School Nights show them the positive work going on in the classroom and beyond.

Relationship building should not be limited to governmental bodies.

For example:

- Discuss whether selected members of the board or senior staff should regularly attend and participate in the local Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations.
- Strengthen relationships with business, labor, philanthropic and faith leaders.
- Have a plan to meet regularly with school partners – PTA, social services, the health department, recreation and parks – to discuss areas of mutual interest as you all serve your students.
- Meet regularly with the newspaper editor or editorial board, not just when you want to complain or receive their support.
- Send MABE's *Calls to Action* and other advocacy materials to local leaders and seek their support.
- Send your district's newsletter to all citizens, not just parents (and not just registered voters!).

Community alliances demonstrate to citizens that their elected officials do not operate in a vacuum. Such alliances or regular meetings also allow for close and mutually beneficial relationships to develop. These relationships are invaluable, both when you need broad public support to advocate for state or local school funding, and when you need support from community public opinion leaders in support of unpopular or controversial proposals or decisions.

INVITE & INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY

One effective local activity is arranging opportunities for your system to be highlighted as the center of your community. It is vitally important that we continue to introduce ourselves to our public, including our legislative leaders.

Invite local legislators and members of the public to visit schools or attend events that highlight successful programs. Arrange for local legislators to tour one or more schools to showcase the district's achievements and successes. Call or email media representatives in advance. Promptly thank the legislators for coming to the school.

Ensure that your board's decision-making is informed by stakeholders. The board should routinely seek input from PTA/PTO leaders, student government associations, school improvement teams, and citizen advisory councils, along with any other advocacy groups in the communities. Along with seeking their input, ensure they are well informed on upcoming issues and policies, along with legislative priorities and positions.

DID YOU KNOW?

MABE's *What Counts* is a proven and effective community engagement tool for boards of education seeking to open or enhance dialogue with stakeholders in their district. Since 2005, numerous Maryland boards have convened *What Counts* forums with valuable results and positive feedback from participants.

For more information about conducting a *What Counts* forum in your district, contact the MABE office.

STRENGTHENING THE MESSAGE WITH "GRASS TOPS" CONNECTIONS

Coalition building is a natural part of local leadership as a board member and it can be a powerful advocacy tool. When working on a specific advocacy effort, decide if a coalition will help achieve goals. Think about the nature of the issue; some have a broader appeal than others.

Look to other boards, teachers, parents, administrators, other local elected officials, business leaders, and education advocates to join the effort. Consider who else may have a stake in the outcome of the issue and how important it is to them. Also, consider who may have a particular influence with decision makers. A team that includes the board president/chair, superintendent, local education association representative, the head of the parent advocate group, and business and faith community leaders makes a very strong statement to legislators.

"Grass Tops" as opposed to the more familiar "grassroots", refers to outreach and coordinated advocacy by a coalition of individuals who are already leaders of local businesses, churches, or non-profit organizations. Grass Tops lobbying need not require any formal coalition, but can be achieved through the routine sharing of information and perspectives. By engaging these leaders, local boards can leverage much broader "grassroots" support and advocacy actions such as calls, emails, or organized rallies, in support of the school system's legislative positions.

THE FIVE Cs OF COALITION BUILDING

- ✓ **Consistency.** Focus on one issue and make sure everyone agrees on the goal. An easy way to reach solidarity is to have coalition members sign a “coalition letter” to legislators that outlines the position. Also, if working on a statewide campaign, check with MABE to ensure that your message is consistent with other boards.

- ✓ **Commitment.** The issue does not have to be the top priority of every coalition partner - but partners do need to commit to action that furthers the cause. Never have a meeting without giving out assignments - signing a joint coalition letter, making a phone call, or agreeing to attend a lobby visit.

- ✓ **Convenience.** Make getting involved easy for coalition partners. The easier it is, the more likely they will help.

- ✓ **Communication**. Keep in touch with allies by phone, email, fax or mail. You can work effectively with groups or individuals even if you rarely see them. Regular communication ensures that all partners continue to understand and agree on the goals and message.

- ✓ **Compromise.** Sometimes bringing diverse groups together requires compromise. Decide where there is flexibility that does not compromise the overall goal. Consider compromising on some points that are not as important to you to gain the strength of numbers and the diversity of coalition partners.

IV. ADVOCACY AT THE STATE LEVEL

MABE'S ADVOCACY ROLE IN ANNAPOLIS

MABE strives to be the primary voice for public education in Annapolis. The unity of 24 local school boards lends strength to our increasing importance in the legislative process, ensuring that the governor and General Assembly turn to MABE to help determine what is best for school children.

MABE's Legislative Committee holds frequent meetings during the legislative session to guide the association's lobbying activities in Annapolis, and invites policy and legislative leaders to exchange ideas. Each board has one vote; however, all members are welcome to attend and participate in discussion during meetings.

MABE's director of governmental relations, in coordination with the MABE leadership, conducts direct lobbying activities including written and oral testimony before the General Assembly. MABE coordinates the GreenStreet Coalition, which is comprised of legislative liaisons from school systems and the superintendents association, and produces a weekly *GreenSheet* summary of legislative activity.

During the legislative session, MABE organizes and hosts a Legislative Day in Annapolis which gives board members the opportunity to meet with legislators to discuss pending legislation and priority issues.

MABE'S LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Overall, approximately 350 of the 2500 bills introduced each year pertain to public elementary and secondary education. MABE's adopted legislative priorities typically involve the operating budget (state education aid), capital budget (school construction funding), and specific issues such as collective bargaining, charter schools, or local funding. In addition, of the 350 education-related bills, MABE typically submits written testimony on 60 to 80 bills and provides oral testimony on 30 to 40 of those.

At the beginning of session, bill synopses and fiscal note requests prompt MABE and school system staff bill reviews. MABE staff identifies and tracks these bills and reports on their status, MABE positions, highlights priority legislation, and requests specific advocacy actions in the weekly *GreenSheet*. MABE staff, in conjunction with the Legislative Committee Chair and the GreenStreet Coalition, identifies bills for written and/or oral testimony, who will testify, and the need for further advocacy actions. MABE staff reports at the Legislative Committee meetings on bill status and calls for action, and recommends positions on selected bills.

MABE, in close partnership with the Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland (PSSAM) and in collaboration with other organizations such as the Maryland State Education Association (MSEA), is the primary source of advocacy on behalf of Maryland's 24 local school systems and the 850,000 public school students.

WHO'S WHO

Maryland's state legislature, called the General Assembly, is comprised of 141 delegates and 47 senators from 47 different districts. Delegates are assigned to one of six committees, including the Ways and Means Committee which considers almost all education related bills; and the Appropriations Committee which adopts the annual operating and capital budgets, including all education and school construction funding.

Finding your legislator:

The Maryland State Archives website (mdelect.net) is one resource for finding names and contact information of federal and state elected officials that represent your district. In addition, the Maryland General Assembly's website (www.mlis.state.md.us) provides essential links to detailed biographies of individual members and rosters by committee and district. The Maryland Manual On-line (www.msa.md.gov/msa/mdmanual/html/mmtoc.html) is perhaps the most valuable resource, providing a comprehensive and updated directory of all state officials, agencies, and activities. On the local level, a visit to the county or city's website will provide similarly valuable information.

Board members are likely to have closer relationships with certain legislators, relationships that may have a pivotal role in the decision-making arena. Several legislators are former educators, former local government officials, and even former school board members. Knowing more about a legislator's background can only benefit the board member preparing to lobby. And much of the lobbying in Annapolis focuses on surprisingly few members and committees.

Committee assignments: The committees and subcommittees legislators are assigned to indicate their primary areas of interest and influence. For example, a legislator sitting on the Ways and Means Committee, which decides all bills relating to the education statute, has one of 22 votes on education policy issues coming before the full committee. But the eight members of the Education Subcommittee are the gatekeepers deciding which bills are even recommended for such a vote. Similarly, subcommittee members are more likely to have particular and well informed interests in the matters being decided.

However, remember that it is important to keep all elected officials advised on education issues. Ultimately, they all vote. Think long-range: Committee assignments change, and a legislator - now well informed through frequent contact with a local board member – may one day serve on a key committee, or be able to ask a probing question, or for amendments or delay, as the full House or Senate is voting.

Voting records: Knowing how a legislator voted in the past on key education issues will provide an idea of where each is likely to stand on the issue at hand. It also may help shape discussions with board members. General Assembly committee voting records for each bill are now available online.

Staff members: Legislative assistants play a key role because their contacts, opinions, and knowledge are shared with their legislator. Get to know the legislators' assistants by name, and make sure the assistants are familiar with board members. They are the gate keepers and can insure an appointment or a returned phone call, or make sure a message is delivered.

Background: Knowing an elected official's background can help establish ties. Where did each go to elementary school, high school or college? What are their professions? What is their governmental service background? Did they serve on a school board or other local government position? Establishing a connection can help with finding common ground.

FOUR COMMITTEES IN FOCUS

At least ninety percent of MABE's advocacy in Annapolis deals with bills pending in one of four House and Senate committees. The members of these committees and the subcommittees that focus even more specifically on public education issues, are the focus of the vast majority of direct, face-to-face lobbying by MABE staff and local board members.

Almost all legislation dealing with public education policy is assigned to the House Ways and Means Committee and Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. The Education Subcommittees of these two committees are the gatekeepers responsible for recommending full committee action, and therefore receive much more individual attention from education advocates, including MABE and local board members, than any other members of the General Assembly.

The House Appropriations Committee and Senate Budget and Taxation Committee hold hearings, deliberate and decide on both the operating and capital budgets. The House Appropriations Committee has two key subcommittees: Education and Economic Development, and Capital Budget. The Senate Budget and Taxation Committee's parallel subcommittees are: Education, Business and Administration, and Capital Budget.

The Maryland General Assembly

- 141 Delegates and 47 Senators, elected to four-year, concurrent terms

- 90-day legislative sessions beginning the second Wednesday in January into early April
- Speaker of the House and President of the Senate elected each session
- The Speaker and President assign all committee chairs and vice chairs
- Committee Chairs name subcommittee chairs, and schedule bill hearings and votes
- Committee meetings are printed in the hearing schedule
- All bills get a hearing, but not necessarily a vote

How a bill becomes a law

- At the request of legislators, bills are drafted by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS).
- A bill must be confined to a single subject (the “one subject rule”).
- First Reading consists of the clerk reading the bill title and assignment to committee.
- Committees hold hearings and may vote favorable, favorable with amendments, unfavorable, or not at all.
- Amendments must be germane to the bill’s subject.
- Second Reading consists of the committee’s bill report to the floor and vote (not a new reprint).

- If the bill passes Second Reading (no recorded vote is required), it is printed for Third Reading, with any amendments.
- Third Reading bills may not be amended and require a majority vote (71 Delegates or 24 Senators).
- Second House – The process repeats, except:
- Third Reading bills may be amended, but must then be returned to the house of origin.
- Conference Committee – If a bill is adopted in different forms and the house of origin does not concur, 3 members of each house are assigned to attempt to reconcile differences.
- The governor signs bills on the day after session and several times in the weeks following.

The Operating Budget

- The budget is an omnibus bill including all agencies, courts, and the legislature.
- The House Appropriations and Senate Budget and Taxation committees review simultaneously.
- The House and Senate alternate initial action on the budget each year (Senate Bill in even years).
- A conference committee always is required to resolve differences.
- The Budget must pass one week before session ends.
- The Budget cannot be vetoed.
- A Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act (BRFA) accompanies the budget, making related statutory changes.

TESTIFYING IN COMMITTEE

Committee hearings are an integral part of the legislative process in Annapolis. These hearings are an opportunity for legislators to take public input on a bill as they begin to consider it in subcommittee, full committee, and potentially the full House or Senate. Legislative hearings are conducted informally, in that they are not judicial proceedings, legislators may ask questions at any time, and anyone signing up on the day of the hearing may testify. Those testifying are typically given three minutes.

While formal training is not necessary in order to testify, there are many things that can be done to prepare which will strengthen testimony before a legislative committee.

Before attending the hearing:

- Prepare remarks. Time is usually limited, so be brief and direct. Written testimony should not be read at committee hearings. Committee staff will distribute copies of written testimony to members of the committee if a sufficient number is provided (House [40]; Senate [20]). Writing comments in outline form is helpful when speaking, and should summarize written testimony.
- Avoid duplication. If other persons will be offering similar testimony at the hearing, try to coordinate testimony and avoid duplication. Well organized testimony is the most effective.
- Contact MABE. Background information and committee procedures such as sign-up schedules and number of copies of testimony can be provided which may be helpful.
- Plan ahead. Hearings are usually scheduled at 1:00 p.m., Tuesdays through Thursdays. Since numerous bills are heard (and in no particular order), prepare to wait until 4:00 p.m. or later to testify.

At the hearing:

- Be punctual. Usually there is only one public hearing at which testimony is taken on a particular bill. If arriving at the last minute or late, there may not be an opportunity to testify. Plan time for parking and passing though security (metal detectors).
- Sign in. Locate the sign-up sheet near the entrance of the hearing room and write name, address, and whether testimony will favor or oppose the bill. After sign-in, check to see if copies of proposed amendments or substitute bills are available, and take written materials to the committee staff for distribution.

When called to make remarks:

- Introduce yourself. Begin by giving your name to the chair and committee members, where you are from, the organization you represent (if any) and your purpose for testifying. For example, “Mr. or Madam Chair and members of the committee, I am John Doe from Smith County. I am here representing the Smith County Board of Education. We support this bill because …”
- Be brief and be sure remarks are clear. Avoid being too technical and do not repeat previously made remarks.
- Be prepared for questions and comments from committee members. These are designed to gain additional information, but don’t answer if you are not sure. Tell the members you will send a written answer to the committee, and then follow through.

DID YOU KNOW?

The House and Senate buildings each have only one public entrance, both on Bladen Street. Be sure to have a photo identification, and be prepared for the process of passing through metal detectors. Add sufficient time for entering the buildings prior to bill hearings, as lines can be long.

THE MARYLAND STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Maryland State Board of Education sets the state's education policies and standards for pre-kindergarten through high school and for Maryland's public libraries and correctional education and vocational rehabilitation services. It passes regulations that have the force of law and is empowered to interpret the true meaning and intent of the law. It also develops three annual budgets (the Maryland State Department of Education headquarters budget, the state aid to local education budget, and state-aided institutions budget) before they are passed on to the governor's office for approval or revision and then to the General Assembly for final action. The board also is required to decide all controversies brought before it that arise under the law. Importantly, the board exercises its considerable legal power with respect for the principle of local control of schools, and deference to local board decisions.

The state board is comprised of 12 members appointed by the governor. Members serve staggered four year terms and may serve two full terms. A student member serves a one year term.

The Maryland state superintendent is chosen by the board for a four-year, renewable term and acts as its secretary-treasurer. The state superintendent does not have a vote but does have an advisory role and is the administrative head of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

MABE places a high priority on maintaining a positive and productive relationship with the state superintendent and MSDE staff. MABE staff and members of the MABE Board of Directors regularly attend meetings of the state board. MABE staff pens *The Monitor*, which provides a comprehensive summary of each monthly meeting. MABE frequently informs the state board of the association's positions on priority issues through testimony, correspondence, and meetings.

V. ADVOCACY AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

MABE encourages all boards of education to participate in the Federal Relations Network (FRN) and engage in advocacy at the federal level. This ensures our federal officials are well informed on the priorities and perspectives of local school systems, and the fiscal and policy issues arising under the myriad of federal programs impacting public education.

THE FEDERAL RELATIONS NETWORK

The Federal Relations Network (FRN) is a joint undertaking of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) and state school boards associations around the country. FRN provides a structure through which school board members can stay informed on federal issues and work in concert to advocate for public education at the federal level. FRN involves local school board members from every congressional district in the country who are committed to grassroots advocacy for public education. The FRN gives members an opportunity to make a difference in the education of our nation's public school children. The ultimate goal of FRN advocacy is to make public education a top priority of the federal government.

MABE'S PARTICIPATION IN FRN

MABE's FRN Committee meets throughout the year to discuss pending issues and coordinate meetings on Capitol Hill. The committee is comprised of board members appointed to represent the association in communicating NSBA and MABE positions to Maryland's federal delegation, including our two U.S. Senators and eight members of the U.S. House of Representatives. MABE representatives attend the annual FRN conference in Washington, D.C., and participate in the "Day on the Hill" congressional office visits. The committee regularly provides members with information and updates about federal legislation.

CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES THAT IMPACT EDUCATION

(reprinted from NSBA's *How to Lobby Your Member of Congress*)

There are many issues beyond traditional "education" programs that impact education. In addition to legislation on education programs and funding, education advocates must pay close attention to federal laws dealing with such areas as tax reform, health care, and environmental mandates, to name a few. Therefore, when looking to see if your members of Congress are on "key" committees that impact education, keep in mind the following committees that are important to public schools:

- House Education and Labor Committee/Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee – consider core education programs and are the "authorizing committees"
- House and Senate Budget Committees – outline the overall spending areas (such as education) in the annual federal budget
- House and Senate Appropriations Committees – appropriate funding for federal programs within limits set by the budget process
- House Commerce/Senate Environment and Public Works Committees – often deal with environmental mandates, commerce and telecommunications
- House Ways and Means/Senate Finance – consider tax and bond issues

Getting to know key legislative aides on Capitol Hill is essential to getting through to your Senator or Representative with input on legislative matters or to secure a meeting. MABE and members of the FRN committee, in conjunction with NSBA, can provide current information on who to contact.

Maryland Association of Boards of Education

621 Ridgely Avenue, Suite 300

Annapolis, MD 21401-1112

410.841.5414, 800.841.8197

Fax: 410.841.6580

www.mabe.org