



Boards Making a Difference

School Boards Move the Needle on Advocacy for Public Ed

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Three districts implement three different strategies to connect with legislators.

Advocacy for public education has never been more important for Iowa schools. As a school board member, this is an essential role, but one that you may not be as comfortable with as budget development or superintendent evaluations. We talked with several school boards across Iowa that are leading the advocacy charge to find out what they are doing and asked them to share their strategies. You may already be implementing similar strategies in your district, or completely different ones—keep in mind that there are many ways to advocate and no matter what strategy you use, you're on the right track. You can be an effective advocate for your students and your schools, and we are here to help.

FAIRFIELD HOSTS ROUND ROBIN LEGISLATIVE FORUM AT SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

The Fairfield school board is an active board interested in legislation, advocacy and lobbying. Over the years they have engaged in various advocacy strategies, like attending Saturday morning legislative forums with local officials, traveling to Des Moines for IASB's Day on the Hill and inviting legislators to tour their district. A few years ago, they decided to try something new and unique—a round robin style legislative forum hosted right at their own board meeting.



Due to its popularity and success, they have continued it every year since. Each board member chooses a legislative priority to speak on during the forum, shares why the priority was selected, the impact on the district, and then opens it up for legislators to ask questions. This past year, both legislators and candidates attended, due to the election year.

The forums are open to the public, and also live streamed for the community, like all their board meetings. A perk of the round-robin technique? Every single board member has a chance to speak and interact with legislators.

The board takes very seriously their role as the voice of community members, parents, teachers and students.

“Through our voices, legislators can see the impact of their decision and their votes. We represent our community’s perspective on public education.”

Meet the Fairfield School Board

CHARLES CITY LEADS ADVOCACY DAY AT THE CAPITOL

After many unsuccessful attempts to reach legislators via normal outreach methods like email and phone calls, the Charles City board and staff decided to take matters into their own hands and arranged their very own Advocacy Day four years ago. Coordinating the day is a team effort—the communications department researches and develops materials for advocates to leave with legislators, the advocates prepare for tough conversations about the issues, and key legislative experts are consulted to achieve maximum results. And it’s not just the school board team that advocates at the Capitol—administration, staff and students interested in advocacy also join.



After the first Advocacy Day, Charles City invited area school districts to attend, strengthening their collective voice for northeastern Iowa and engaging even more legislators. This year, they invited 12 districts to attend the Advocacy Day. Multiple school districts within the same county meet with legislators at the same time—resulting in a bigger impact overall.

What drives the board to invest so much energy coordinating and participating in this effort? According to them, it’s a no-brainer and part of the role as a school board.

“If not us, then who? Who else will tell our district’s story and share how these decisions will impact our students? It’s our role as school board members to ensure our voices are heard.”

Meet the Charles City School Board

HLV HOSTS MEAL AND LEGISLATIVE FORUM FOR AREA DISTRICTS

For the past 13 years, HLV has provided an opportunity for school board members and administrators from over a dozen nearby school districts to share a meal with their legislators. The dinner, hosted by the local Ruritan Club, is followed by opening statements from each legislator and designated time for school board members to ask questions. IASB staff are also on the agenda to share updates on education legislation.

This strategy is a win-win for both school boards and legislators because it's an avenue for legislators to hear from multiple boards on a variety of education issues.

Legislators depend on these informal conversations to gather facts and make decisions at the Capitol. Attendees are hopeful this approach can help increase legislative support for public education.

“When our representatives hear directly from us as the voices of our district, the impact is greater. This informal face-to-face discussion helps build a groundwork and nurture relationships with the people making decisions at the Capitol.”



[Meet the HLV School Board](#)