

Advocacy

A Must for School Board Members

December 3, 2019

J.T. Kessler, VSBA Government Relations Specialist

The General Assembly

140 Elected Members of the Virginia General Assembly

- 100 Members of the House of Delegates serve two-year terms
- 40 Members of the Senate serve four-year terms



Election 2019

- The Senate of Virginia
 - Democrats control the Chamber 21-19.
- The House of Delegates
 - Democrats control the Chamber 55-45.

2020 Legislative Session

- **A Change in the Balance of Power**
 - New majority parties in both chambers bring new committee chairs, potential changes to rules of each chamber, new staff, etc.
 - Will there be bipartisanship and cooperation? How do Democrats interpret the election results and their majority status?

2020 Legislative Session

- **Key Questions?**
 - How do the money committees address the Governor’s Budget priorities?
 - Will there be competition for funding between K-12, Higher Ed, and Early Childhood?
 - What does the General Assembly do with the Board of Education’s prescribed SOQs?
 - Is there a desire to raise new revenue?
 - Pre-session filing for legislation began Monday, November 18, 2019.

2020 Legislative Session

- The 2020 Virginia General Assembly convenes Wednesday, January 8, 2020.
 - <https://www.facebook.com/VirginiaSchoolBoardsAssociation/> (Updates during session)
 - <http://vsbalegislativeupdate.blogspot.com/> (For up-to-date information from VSBA lobbyists.)
 - http://www.vsba.org/advocacy_government_relations/education_bills/ (For video updates during session and monthly after session.)

Grassroots Advocacy

- Efforts to persuade policy makers through mobilization/participation of the public:
 - Educating and raising awareness around an issue
 - Voicing support or opposition to legislation or regulations
 - Localizing an issue to show how it impacts citizens
 - Generating earned media around the issue

Why Advocate?

- School board members possess a unique and powerful position in the education debate.
- Board members are often first to see problems in the education system, as well as predicaments students/families face that prevent academic success for kids.
- Front line policy makers must take an active role in advocating for the best education system for all of Virginia's school children.

Does It Work?

- Grassroots advocacy is conducted by constituents. It can be a very effective tool for influencing policy outcomes:
 - Constituents vote for elected officials
 - Constituents may have a connection to the policy maker and/or staff member
 - Constituents are “real”! They know the district and can share local stories
 - Assists lobbying efforts

Where to Begin?

- What is the issue?
- Is this issue one of direct importance to the organization? (i.e.: Does VSBA have an official position on the issue?)
- Is the issue state, national, or a combination?
- Is the issue legislative, regulatory, or both?
- What are your objectives advocating for or against the issue?

Grassroots Tactics

- Schedule an in-person meeting in Richmond (during session) or in the district
- Invite policy maker(s) to your schools
- Attend local forums and meetings
- Make a phone call to the policy makers Richmond office
- Engage via social media
- Send an Email or Letter

Advocacy Tips

- Identify yourself as a School Board Member from local school division and your reason for your message
- Know the issue and keep message concise
- Localize the message and address how the issue will impact the policy maker's district
- Make a specific request for action (to support of oppose)

Advocacy Tips

- Offer to be a resource on future education related issues/topics
- Thank the policy maker for their time and willingness to serve the public
- If in-person meeting, make sure to follow up with a concise Email and reiterate your request for action
- Make friends with policy makers legislative staff

Next Steps!

- Schedule visits with your Senator(s) Delegate(s) **before** the legislature convenes in January.
- Send a message individually, or from your Board/Division, to your legislative delegation and offer to be resources when they have questions about pending education matters.

Next Steps!

- Watch for Legislative Alert Emails once session begins January 8. It is important to email your legislators when the action alert is issued because legislation moves fast during the General Assembly session.

Additional Resources

- **VSBA Government Relations Website:**
 - http://www.vsba.org/advocacy_government_relations/resource_info/
- One stop Advocacy shop that Contains VSBA Legislative Positions, Who is My Legislator Tool, a List Legislators by VSBA Region, Advocacy Tools, and much more!

Save the Date

- **VSBA Capital Conference**

January 13th and 14th 2020

Downtown Richmond Marriott

Register on VSBA website, www.vsba.org

Questions?