

# Legislative Advocacy for Education Funding

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## ABSTRACT

Legislative advocacy for education funding is a crucial mechanism through which citizens, educators, and policymakers collaborate to ensure equitable and sufficient resources for public schools. This paper examines the role of legislative advocacy in shaping education policies, the historical and socio-economic context of education funding, and the legislative processes involved in securing financial support for schools. It further examines effective advocacy strategies, including grassroots mobilization, coalition building, and leveraging data-driven storytelling to influence decision-makers. Additionally, this study presents case studies demonstrating successful advocacy efforts that led to significant policy changes. The findings highlight the importance of sustained civic engagement, strategic communication, and cross-sector partnerships in achieving long-term funding solutions for public education.

**Keywords:** Legislative Advocacy, Education Funding, Public Policy, Grassroots Mobilization, Educational Equity, Coalition Building.

## INTRODUCTION

Legislative advocacy is the process of educating and persuading lawmakers to vote a particular way or to take a particular action on a policy issue. This particular form of community advocacy focuses on shaping educational policy. The collective voices of local citizens are powerful, and when they come together, they can influence lawmakers to address the issue of education funding. Successful legislative advocacy means making transparent connections between policy decisions, funding, and service delivery, particularly as it manifests in the day-to-day operation of the school district [1, 2]. The primary goal of legislative advocacy for education funding at the local level is to engage as many citizens as possible in advocating for public funding to support the mission of public schools. Reaching this goal involves several other objectives: educated citizens can articulate the link between funding and district goals, objectives, and priorities; the belief that a deep understanding of the importance of education is a necessary precursor for those who may engage in the process of legislative advocacy. Those who are responsible for teaching community members about education must be informed citizens themselves [3, 4]. Historical evidence reveals that educational advocacy initiatives empower local citizens to become engaged in articulating the importance of funding to their elected officials at the state and federal levels. Throughout time, grassroots initiatives for legislative advocacy have tended to follow years of decreased educational funding, economic recession, teacher layoffs, and program cuts. It provides a systemic, non-adversarial, and strategic framework for successful advocacy for education funding. This step-by-step process is designed to create a multi-faceted approach to legislatively advocate for children in public schools by engaging a diverse constituency in the school district. By reaching out and engaging a wide range of stakeholders—beyond school children, their families, and staff—this model enables the community to provide a unified voice in support of local and state public education. By discussing challenges and outcomes of supplemental funding, this case study provides a working example of the real-life implications and results of such a model [5, 6].

### **The Importance of Education Funding**

Education is the key to a bright future for America. The effect of adequate funding on the ability to provide quality education and a safe, healthy, educationally sound, and nurturing environment for students is well documented. Educational resources, including textbooks, computers, and science materials, as well as extracurricular activities, are in many cases funded from the operating budget of the school system. Inadequate funding can keep schools from offering the breadth of programs that contribute to school success, such as strong courses in science, languages, art, and music, as well as technology education and family and consumer science classes. Additionally, many health and safety-related programs, including full-service community schools and before- and after-school care, could not operate without additional funds [7, 8]. It is a statistical fact that school districts serving the highest populations of students living in poverty and other needs receive, on average, the least funding per child. In the United States, more than 90% of funding for public schools comes from state and local governments. When local budgets are inadequate to provide adequate educational opportunities, educational equity becomes an urgent issue. The American tradition and history of public funding of education is supported by numerous legal decisions requiring education as a fundamental right. Studies have shown that increased education funding is associated with a reduction in adult poverty and with increased personal and state earnings. The idea that a society where public policy is determined by the degree to which society can be expected to be improved by an educated constituency is not possible without investment in that education. Numerous studies have documented the strong correlation between increased funding and improved student outcomes [9, 10].

### **Understanding The Legislative Process**

The legislative process is complex but crucial to both seeking and maintaining sufficient funding for education in American schools. The federal government does not contribute to a major portion of education costs in the United States; education funding is determined primarily at the state and local levels. As such, most advocacy must focus on those levels and must encompass two areas: funding for special education and formula funding that helps meet the needs of all students. The passage of legislation also puts pressure on state and local resources as schools label more students as not meeting state standards [11, 12]. The legislative cycle generally follows these steps: proposal or drafting, consideration, regular order committee process of work at the committee level, reporting a bill to the full chamber, floor action in the house of origin, work at the conference committee or rule committee level, and final action. Advocacy is important at every stage. The makeup of each of these steps can vary, making advocacy more of an art than an exact science. There are approximately 18 steps in the process, each with varying importance, and every bill taken on its own has its own strategy in the process. Legislation is made as a result of political compromise, and there are no guarantees when legislation will be enacted. Tracking legislation means that public schools need many provisions for equity, student access, and workforce supports. This is important at the state, local, and federal levels. The actual letters of messages are less important: only that you continually communicate over time on the same subject as an advocate concerning your school. You can tell your own personal story that is illustrative and filled with emotion to help advocacy [13, 14].

### **Strategies For Effective Advocacy**

Effective communication is focused on a clear and concise message. What are the most important things that your legislator needs to know? Make sure you can answer that question and make sure that you tell your friends who might support your effort to communicate with your legislator. Use your personal stories to tell your legislator why you care about education funding. More than any other group, personal constituents can mobilize support. Use data to support your storytelling. Data can inspire and persuade just as effectively. Grassroots mobilization is about finding and mobilizing the people who already support you and your cause. Once you have mobilized them, make sure they engage in the action. Fifty-three percent of federal legislators say that communication from constituents has a big impact on the lawmakers' decisions, and a poll shows that fifty-three percent of U.S. adults say that they and their family or close friends would be most likely to become active on social media about a specific issue or causes close to their hearts. Social media use among adult internet users in the Midwest and West stands at sixty-nine percent, larger than in any other region. These trends make it clear that legislators are listening and acting based on how and when their constituents communicate with them. Additionally, when it comes to directing endorsements or funds, legislators' top three choices are to the people who are doing the best job educating them. It is important to begin at the local level with the hopes of moving to a

national level. Legislators are more likely to support issues that have been shown to be popular on a national scale. Grassroots Centers for Education Advocacy: Become a clearinghouse and meeting spot. Share your accomplishments, setbacks, and strategies. Identify your local networks and figure out what is the best means of communication for your constituents. Also, consider creating or updating your group to ensure that your advocacy efforts remain consistent with your campus colleagues. A network of credit-bearing service-learning courses across higher education institutions, which focus on how grassroots advocacy, grounded in the unique mission of each campus, can lead to system-wide change. As a result, each campus' course has been collaborating with a community agency for the last year and a half to advance the same policy agenda item. You may be asked to participate in training to ensure your voice is heard in this case. In addition, your participants should write or call those congressmen who represent the district where the campus or agency is located, urging them to support these efforts. Long-term relationships are necessary in order to be an effective advocate. Do not be discouraged if you do not see immediate results. In-person visits, letters, emails, and phone calls are effective tools in maintaining and building this relationship. Remember, voting is the highest form of advocacy. If you disagree with a legislator's votes and actions, getting involved can enable you to get better access to legislators, remind our leaders of the importance of voting, and meet other people in your community interested in the same issues. Compare the positions and votes of candidates in this and past elections with your own. In light of all the political activity, do not rush your advocacy work. Be aware of the current issues when you begin to engage with legislators. Adapt your strategies to changing circumstances. There are a great number of ways to approach advocacy, and some will be more or less effective given changes in the political landscape. Also, be strategic in your work and plan. When you have a specific message to sell and want resources to back that message up, you can be successful in leveraging political support [15, 16].

### **Building Coalitions and Partnerships**

The need for increased resources for education across the board seems to be resonating among various organizations across the country. Once the time for action occurs, the question for school board members and administrators becomes one of "Who will stand with us to advocate for necessary funding for schools?" Whether advocating for funding or seeking support for a specific legislative or regulatory change, relying only on one's organization to create a demand is limiting. Thus, it is beneficial to build a coalition to amplify the voices advocating for one position. Every additional voice in the choir will make the interest that much louder and difficult to ignore. This additional presence, even from an outside entity, also tends to give greater legitimacy to the interest being represented beyond one's own standpoint [17, 18]. In increasing the voices calling for enhanced education funding, partnerships lead to increased grassroots involvement, enhanced public relations visibility, and broader perspectives for educational services, research, and resources. The most immediate benefit from partnerships would be opening new avenues for funding by compiling all partners' efforts to advocate for education. In addition to passing on information, agencies can provide expertise and add credibility to a case for new funding. In assisting in building a coalition, an agency can link organizations and individuals to one another to exchange ideas, prospects, and results. Networks that extend across organizations are connections to be cherished. Public agencies are chartered for teamwork and can provide a fertile source of information, assistance, and resources from partnering organizations for any cause [19, 20].

### **Case Studies and Best Practices**

Colorado ASSET / Advancing Futures 2020: Improving Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness for All Coloradans Case Study I: DREAMer and ally groups successfully lobbied for a bill that removed the requirement that students attending college on non-immigrant visas file a petition to qualify as in-state residents. Students who qualify for in-state tuition, a process that now only requires attending a Colorado high school for 3 years and graduating to apply for, are thereby eligible for state need-based financial aid. Advocates were able to communicate to members the double gain of creating in-state tuition and ensuring that it automatically qualified students for state and institutional aid [21, 22].

Best Practices:

- Hearing from students about the benefits of financial aid was particularly powerful.
- Clear framing: These were students who had graduated from an in-state high school.
- Supporting materials, especially the explainer available to legislators and other interested members.
- Sustained workshops for key influencers [23, 24].

Case Study II: When a state aid program instituted in 1967 was trapped in history about who qualified for it, a joint push by the affected institutions, in partnership with students and families themselves, led to a declaration of intent and a budget request for 2017-2018, increasing to the targeted amount for 2018-

2019. State boards, including the Higher Education Strategic Planning Steering Committee and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, support the initiative as an administrative advocacy package [25, 26].

Best Practices: • Frame the investments as “urgent, rapid” and “bold action” to arrest the return to historic lows. The use of an “intent” resolution puts the value and focus on the statement from the state rather than on implementation difficulty [27, 28].

## CONCLUSION

Advocating for education funding through legislative processes is essential for ensuring that all students have access to quality learning environments and resources. A well-informed and engaged citizenry, coupled with strategic grassroots mobilization, can effectively influence policy decisions that impact school funding. The case studies presented demonstrate that sustained efforts, coalition building, and persuasive storytelling can lead to meaningful policy changes. As education funding remains a critical issue, stakeholders must continue to engage with policymakers, leverage data-driven advocacy, and foster partnerships to create lasting improvements. Ultimately, legislative advocacy serves as a powerful tool to uphold the fundamental right to education and advance societal progress through well-funded public schools.

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