



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
www.wsascd.org

‘Critical Questions’ Series December 2008

Why Does Advocacy Matter?

As most of us would agree, there are still major issues needing attention with the reauthorization of the “No Child Left Behind” legislation. In 2004, ASCD International included the term ‘advocating’ in its mission statement for the first time. This indicated a major additional initiative for the association. Now, not only are we the world’s preeminent association of educators focusing on best practices in learning, teaching and leading – we are now going to share what we knew to be good for kids with those who are in positions to make decisions about legislation. Our advocacy work has resulted in an annual Day on the Hill in Washington, D.C.

What is the delicate balance between pushing a student who has Individualized Education Plan to excel, and punishing that child with a one size fits all test? How can we better understand the unique talents and challenges of each child, and school, by using multiple measures as lenses, instead of a single test? How can we address the assessment of a child’s learning who is new to our country, while knowing it takes nearly seven years to become literate in the English language? Schools that serve a disadvantaged population are expected to meet the same benchmark at the same time as an affluent school. Does punishing a school by sending letters to the community and offering school choice make sense in the day to day lives of neighborhoods, families and children? These are some of the questions that representatives from Washington State ASCD sought to address in our recent visit to our elected representatives on Capitol Hill.

The goal of this annual event is to provide ASCD members with the necessary tools and resources to advocate for policies that support what is best for students. Participants visited Capitol Hill to meet with their members of Congress and address critical education policy issues, including those highlighted in ASCD’s 2008 Legislative Agenda. Over 200 educators from around the nation met with legislators on the same day in September to tell the story of how “No Child Left Behind” is impacting students in classrooms in their respective states.

The priority issues raised with elected officials focused on the need for:

- Multiple indicators of achievement to determine student, school, and district performance
- Resources to recruit, develop, and retain effective teachers and school leaders.
- An improved system of school improvement and accountability that helps schools meet their unique needs.

- Innovative high school redesign that ensures high school graduates become productive citizens, prepared for success in a competitive global market.
- Adequate funding for special education and ELL programs

While in Washington D.C., our team met with Senators Cantwell and Murray's offices and Representatives Reichert and McMorris-Rodger's offices. We shared the stories of individual students and schools in our state that were being adversely impacted by a one size fits all measure. We also had invaluable conversations about adequate funding. While empathetic to the tough economic times, our team challenged legislators to think about greater flexibility in the implementation of federal programs such as special education and ELL. For example, in some schools, for every federal dollar brought in, it can take between two and three dollars to implement an effective and legal program, given the current guidelines and restrictions. Therefore, local levies are being tapped to augment these needs. How do school districts that have difficulty passing levies maintain integrity of service to their students?

In all cases, elected officials from Washington supported the ideas we were sharing around the educational priorities. Congressman Reichert stated, "I am passionate about these issues and realize we need to do some work to better implement "No Child Left Behind". His and Congresswoman McMorris Rodgers' offices asked us to partner with them in *crafting policy language* to help address the shortcomings in the current legislation. With the support of ASCD International, we will be doing just that. We must remember that having this initial conversation, though powerful, is only a first step in advocating change in our local schools.

School practitioners must become equipped to have similar conversations with their local school boards, staffs and communities at large. Understanding how national and state legislative decisions impact their local schools empowers all stakeholders to advocate with decision makers that may not always hear or see the impact of their decisions. We must stay abreast of the legislative horizon and assert our voice in making sure others are aware of the decisions being made. We learned first hand that even at the national level, we have a powerful voice by advocating for the children we work with each and every day. Be bold. Speak for the children.

Dr. Becky Cooke, Principal
Prairie View Elementary
Mead School District
Mead, Washington
bcooke@mead.k12.wa.us

Tim Nootenboom, Principal
Cascade View Elementary
Snoqualmie Valley School District
Snoqualmie, Washington
nootenboomt@svsd410.org