



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
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Why is it important for Local School Districts to Have a Voice in Washington State Government and in the Federal Government in Washington, DC?

The great philosopher Plato said, “*The punishment wise men suffer from indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by unwise men.*” Decisions made by the State and Federal governments can greatly assist local educators in achieving their objectives or conversely create roadblocks for increasing student achievement. Educators and School Boards must activate their voice in order to create a Whole Child Education in the two Washingtons.

Perhaps more than at any other time in current history, educational reform is at the forefront of local, state and federal governmental agendas. Yet, concurrently it is a time of scarcity of economic resources. We on local boards and in local districts have a choice: we can help shape state and federal educational policy or we can be shaped by it. The Tacoma School Board decided we wanted to be a shaper in the policy setting process. We wanted to have a voice in student assessment, establishment of innovative programs and processes, and in defining school funding issues in an equitable manner.

State legislatures and the US Congress are complex organizations. Our state legislature is composed of 147 members and the US Congress has 535. In the US Congress over 5000 pieces of legislation are introduced each year. In Olympia, over 600 pieces are introduced each session. Identifying and tracking those bills that directly involve education or may have unintended impacts on local districts is not something that can be done effectively by a part time board or district staff whose primary focus is increasing student achievement.

While letters and contacts from individuals and organizations to specific legislators and administrators are important, there are people in Olympia and D.C. who work every day in the business of communication. They are called governmental affairs consultants. Engaging a governmental affairs consultant is one of the wisest decisions a District can make if they want to influence legislative decisions. They understand the Congressional and State legislative processes. In addition, having

representation builds legislative credibility and demonstrates commitment to our issues. There is no substitute for day to day representation in the State Capitol and Washington, D. C.

When it comes to providing information and advocating for specific positions, these are the voices that can answer questions and clarify positions. With the competition regarding divergent issues and finances, an everyday familiar voice is critical if we want to help shape legislation and compete for funding. Knowledge is power! This is why Tacoma Public Schools engaged highly qualified and experienced consultants to represent our students, staff and community voices in Olympia and Washington, D.C. We have seen in a short time our influence already being felt in both venues.

We challenge each community/district to engage in a conversation on how and why it is important for local school districts to have a voice in the two Washingtons. We challenge you to develop an agenda that supports the Whole Child!

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