

# BE YOUR OWN BEST ADVOCATE!



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### PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Creating a Culture, Engaging Communities*

**A**t the National Principals Conference in Philadelphia this summer, I attended several presentations on advocacy. In one session, a panel member said, “If I had known how much influence I had as a principal, I would have put more effort into advocacy.”

Principals often shine the spotlight on the great work that is done by their students and teachers, but spending time being advocates for their profession, their building and their students with key community

members is important. One of our goals as advocates is to steer policy where we know it needs to go — where research shows we should go. Developing relationships beyond your school building can pay off for how decisions are made for the work that you do each day.

### LOCAL INFLUENCE

Principals have a tremendous amount of influence at the local level. You are a valuable resource for your superintendent, district office administrators and school board members. You are their link to the reality of life in a school building. Invite them in often so that they can

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see both the joys and the challenges of your work.

Connect with your district so that you are aware of and involved with key district initiatives. Research shows that district initiatives work best when there is principal support. In larger districts, divide and conquer. Talk to your principal group to see

how each of you might get involved with one district project or committee so that collectively you are all attending to many different issues.

Your parents and community members become your advocates when you connect with them to share specific examples of building needs. Build a coalition of parents who can speak to what is going well and to what resources may be needed to do better. Parent groups can then mobilize a wider network of parents on your behalf. Community groups like the chamber of commerce or service clubs can also be your advocates when you develop relationships with them.

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When issues are contentious and you are worried that you may isolate yourself or put yourself in a risky professional position, do what you can. Perhaps you only speak about the facts of the matter and do not share your opinion. Maybe you can say, “Are you aware that...” or “The implications of this might be...” Perhaps others, like teachers or parents, can be more public voices on your behalf. Every school has its own unique culture that will have to be carefully navigated. In addition, each district has different policies in terms of how principals might navigate social media so pay attention to those details so that you know what you can and cannot do.

### STATE AND FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS

Develop relationships with your state and federal legislators. Reach out to them, especially before the legislative session begins in January, and invite

them to your school. You will most likely work with their legislative assistant to schedule a meeting, and getting to know this person is valuable as well. Emails and phone calls are great, too, but personal, face-to-face meetings are most effective. Legislators need to be informed about their constituents and visiting local schools is a real and authentic way to learn about their community.

### QUICK TIPS FOR ADVOCACY

The NAESP and NASSP websites also offer tips on how to work with lawmakers, but here are some quick ideas:

- Pick three issues that are important to you and focus on one as your top priority that you cannot live without.
- Have an “elevator speech” ready to go about this issue — what would you say to a policymaker about this topic in 30 seconds?

- Pick one or two good sources of information about education to read once a week (like the Marshall Memo, EdWeek, or another publication).
- Become familiar with your national association’s advocacy page including their legislative platforms. These websites are great sources of information.
- Be sure to say “thank you” for work that has already happened on behalf of your school community and then suggest further steps if needed. ■

### ADVOCACY TIPS:

NAESP Advocacy Tips:  
[www.naesp.org/advocacy](http://www.naesp.org/advocacy)

NASSP Advocacy Tips:  
[www.nassp.org/advocacy](http://www.nassp.org/advocacy)

## Share the Value of Membership!



Being a principal is more than a profession. It's a passion.

AWSP/NAESP membership nurtures both.



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