

# GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY WORKS!

## Let's Unite to Make a Difference in 2020

*By Terry Spradlin, Executive Director*



**T**he second regular session of the 121st Indiana General Assembly convened on January 5, 2020. This will be a “short session” that is expected to conclude by March 11. It is worth repeating words from my previous column that while the volume of K-12 education legislation to be introduced and passed should

be significantly lower than that of the 2019 session, there will be opportunities to advance the ISBA agenda and promote pro-K-12

public education bills. However, we will also be confronted with bills that challenge our ideology of public education as the pillar of democracy. We need to be ready to be a strong voice and united champion for K-12 public education and to advocate for the ISBA 2020 legislative priorities. The K-12 public education community in general, and ISBA and its members, achieved many victories in the prior session due to effective grassroots advocacy efforts. Let's continue to elevate our advocacy efforts to ensure a successful short session now and to build momentum for the future.

### **WHY IS YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN ADVOCACY SO IMPORTANT?**

Especially at a time when social and political challenges

confront K-12 public education more than ever, your voice representing the best interests of Hoosier students must be heard. You have clout! You have firsthand understanding of your school corporation's goals, student achievement outcomes, and resource needs. You regularly deal with the complexities of school corporation budgeting and financial matters. You are an informed source of information about education policy. Finally, you have a story to tell and can relate how proposed legislation impacts your school community.

**We need to be ready to be a strong voice and united champion for K-12 public education and to advocate for the ISBA 2020 legislative priorities.**

One bill comes to mind from the 2019 session to illustrate what can be achieved through the strength in numbers of school board members speaking out at the right time, and with a unified message. A bill was on the third reading calendar in the Senate that would have greatly restricted when school corporations can conduct a referendum. This bill was adversarial to local control and would have restricted the ability of school corporations to generate necessary funds for projects, programs or personnel. It took a tremendous effort and a timely response to a call-to-action alert from educators and school board members to contact area senators in opposition to the bill – to kill the bill. One legislator told me that he changed his position to align with our position on the bill because he, “heard from 12 constituents over the (prior) weekend asking for his vote against the bill.” The senator considered this a significant number that was enough to sway his position. The bill was not called down on the last day for the third reading of bills and we prevailed in killing the proposal. This is powerful evidence of what we can accomplish together!

Sometimes, members think that their singular effort won't make a difference, but this passive or reluctant perspective leads to inactivity and subsequently to passage of legislation detrimental to public education. Preparation and regular engagement in the advocacy process can make all the difference. Sharing “your local story” is impactful too. To assist school board members to be successful advocates in the policymaking process, ISBA has created the **Legislative Action Network**. This program is a product of ISBA's 2018-2021 Strategic Plan.

## GOAL AREA #4 OF ISBA STRATEGIC PLAN: TAKE ISBA ADVOCACY TO THE NEXT LEVEL

We aim to accomplish the following items through our advocacy program:

- ✓ Inform, influence, and shape sound governance policy for K-12 education
- ✓ Increase members' overall knowledge of legislative processes at the state and federal level
- ✓ Equip members with effective techniques and strategies for targeted grassroots advocacy and campaigns
- ✓ Enhance relationships with state governmental leaders

## ISBA LEGISLATIVE SERVICES AND WEB RESOURCES

Legislative services are one of the four core services that ISBA provides to members. Lisa Tanselle, general counsel, and I are your registered lobbyists who are your “boots on the ground.” We cover committee hearings, testify on bills, and communicate regularly with legislators. The legislative services from ISBA include:

- ✓ State House representation
- ✓ Weekly ISBA legislative updates (typically every Friday during session)
- ✓ Bill tracking list service (updated in real time each session day)
- ✓ Legislative update webinars (once per month)
- ✓ Call-to-action legislative alerts (as needed on critical issues)
- ✓ Website resources
- ✓ Advocacy Guide (second edition available on the Legislative Services page of the ISBA website)
- ✓ 2nd Annual State House Day (February 11, 2020; more details below)

The first step in effective grassroots advocacy is to get informed. Thorough preparation will make you a more confident and successful advocate. There are many resources available to help build your knowledge base. The Legislative Services page of the ISBA website includes key resources to follow during the 2020 session and adoption of new K-12 laws, including:

- ✓ The bill tracking list
- ✓ ISBA Legislative Priorities and Foundational Statements
- ✓ A library of the weekly legislative updates
- ✓ A link to help you to identify your area legislators
- ✓ Legislator contact information lists

- ✓ How a bill becomes a law process overview
- ✓ ISBA white paper on K-12 funding in Indiana (new version coming soon!)
- ✓ Advocacy Guide

The ISBA Legislative Services page is located at: [isba-ind.org/legislative](http://isba-ind.org/legislative). The Indiana General Assembly website is naturally the best resource to track the activity of the legislature and is located at: [iga.in.gov](http://iga.in.gov)

## LEGISLATIVE ACTION NETWORK

While your ISBA lobby team strives to be in the right place at the right time, our two voices are more effective when our efforts are complemented by a troop of school board members participating in the Legislative Action Network, ISBA's formal grassroots advocacy program. The LAN is designed to help unify and mobilize "the voice" of school board members and increase State House visibility. Through this program, we provide you with the information, resources, strategies, and guidance to engage in the grassroots advocacy process. The program to cultivate and coordinate the localized grassroots advocacy efforts is through each school board's designated legislative liaison, although we encourage all board members to engage in grassroots advocacy.

## DUTIES OF THE LEGISLATIVE LIAISON

- ✓ Know and support the 2020 ISBA Legislative Priorities.
- ✓ Know your area legislators: go to the IGA "find your legislator" website link: [iga.in.gov/legislative/find-legislators](http://iga.in.gov/legislative/find-legislators).
- ✓ Track ISBA Legislative Services/LAN communications and provide timely updates on legislative session activities at local board meetings. We suggest making this a regular board meeting agenda item.
- ✓ Identify ISBA legislative priorities for which you will be willing to testify, if necessary, during committee hearings on these bills.
- ✓ Communicate regularly via email, phone calls or letters with area legislators.
- ✓ Make yourself a contact and trusted source for your legislators within your district.
- ✓ Coordinate email, phone call, or letter writing campaigns to your area legislators, media and the broader community, especially in response to call-to-action alerts.
- ✓ Organize legislative forums or attend Third House meetings hosted by other organizations.

To become your school corporation's Legislative Action Network Liaison, please have your superintendent send your name and preferred contact information to Kayla Baldwin at: [kbaldwin@isba-ind.org](mailto:kbaldwin@isba-ind.org).

## TOP 10 TIPS OF EFFECTIVE GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

Ultimately, our collective success is incumbent upon all board members engaging in grassroots advocacy. To help ease your comfort in fulfilling this role, here are some helpful tips to consider:

- ▶ **TIP #1: Research your legislators' backgrounds, committee assignments and voting records on education issues.** The best source for this information is the Indiana General Assembly website and reading the pages and biographies of the individual members.
- ▶ **TIP #2: Develop relationships with your legislators by routinely visiting, writing and calling.** Let them know you are a constituent. Take notes about them to assist you with future conversations with them.
- ▶ **TIP #3: Don't overdo your lobbying.** Be brief and know what you are talking about. Use ISBA talking points. Clearly and quickly explain your opposition or support for the issue you are contacting them about.
- ▶ **TIP #4: Show respect. Be positive. Remember to thank legislators** for pro-public education votes and support of the ISBA legislative priorities. Conclude each communication with an expression of gratitude for their time.
- ▶ **TIP #5: Lobby with your real-life experience.** It's your most persuasive tool; use local examples.
- ▶ **TIP #6: Set priorities.** When everything is important, nothing is important. Know your "ask" and focus your conversation around it.
- ▶ **TIP #7: Shore up lobbying allies** from your community to demonstrate broad support; collaborate with others.
- ▶ **TIP #8: Don't forget the media.** Getting your message out to the press – letters-to-the editor, news releases, etc. – can influence your legislators and public opinion.
- ▶ **TIP #9: Be sensitive to partisan politics, but always try to come across as nonpartisan.** In politics, there are no permanent allies and no permanent adversaries.



► **TIP #10: Be reasonable and consider compromise on contentious issues.**

Remember, there are more than 1,000 bills that are introduced each session, and everyone thinks their issues are most important – so many people and issues vie for the attention of legislators. Sometimes, simply informing legislators on your position will pay long-term dividends whether you immediately change their position or not.

**COME TO INDY! STATE HOUSE DAY FEBRUARY 11, 2020**

Culminate your advocacy efforts and help ensure a successful legislative session for K-12 public education by visiting Indianapolis and meeting with your area legislators at the State House. This can be in conjunction with ISBA's 2nd Annual State House Day, or separately. ISBA staff can assist you in scheduling these meetings if desired. The State House Day event will include a briefing session, legislative panel, a luncheon, and State House office visits. We ask that the legislative liaison for each school board attend. If they are not available, we ask that a designee be selected to represent your board. ISBA will be sending detailed information out about this event regularly beginning in January. If you have any questions about the event, please contact Kayla Baldwin at the aforementioned email address.

**CONCLUSION**

Please take time to acquaint yourself with the full details of the ISBA Foundational Statements and 2020 Legislative Priorities. Together, we are better when we stand up for Hoosier students and high-quality schools with a unified voice. Your local engagement and leadership are paramount to our success. Thank you for your ongoing contributions and response to the call-to-action to support K-12 public education in Indiana. Let's keep "fighting the good fight!" 🎓



**2020  
CALENDAR OF  
EVENTS**

**JANUARY 10**

Ensuring Safe, Secure, and Supportive Learning Environments Seminar  
*Ivy Tech Conference Center*

**JANUARY 28**

ISBA Leadership Seminar  
*Scott County*

**FEBRUARY 4**

ISBA Leadership Seminar  
*TBD*

**FEBRUARY 5**

ISBA Leadership Seminar  
*Plainfield Admin Center*

**FEBRUARY 6**

ISBA Leadership Seminar  
*TBD*

**FEBRUARY 11**

ISBA Leadership Seminar  
*TBD*

**FEBRUARY 11**

ISBA Statehouse Day  
*Marriott Downtown*

**FEBRUARY 12**

ISBA Leadership Seminar  
*Central Noble*

**MARCH 4-6**

NSBA Annual Conference  
*Chicago, IL*

**JUNE 10**

ISBA June School Law Seminar  
*Ivy Tech Conference Center*

**JUNE 17**

ISBA/IAPSS/IASBO Budget/Finance Seminar  
*Ivy Tech Conference Center*

**AUGUST 21**

ISBA/IAPSS Collective Bargaining  
*Ivy Tech Conference Center*

**SEPTEMBER 28-29**

ISBA/IAPSS 71st Annual Fall Conference  
*Indiana Convention Center*

**DECEMBER 9**

ISBA December School Law Seminar  
*Ivy Tech Conference Center*

*For more information on ISBA meetings and locations visit our website at [www.isba-ind.org](http://www.isba-ind.org)*

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