

# GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY WORKS!

WE CAN MAKE  
A DIFFERENCE  
IN 2021



*By Terry Spradlin, Executive Director*

**T**he first regular session of the 122nd Indiana General Assembly convened on January 4, 2021.

This will be a “long session” that is required by law to conclude by April 29. The two essential duties of the state legislature will be to adopt the 2021-2023 biennial state budget and redistrict legislative boundaries based on the 2020 U.S. decennial census. Like most sessions, we anticipate that K-12 education policy will remain a hot topic, too. In the budget session of 2019, ISBA began that session tracking a staggering 193 bills and 116 new education laws have been passed in just the last three years!

The 2021 session will present challenges to K-12 public education – such as proposals to expand school choice programs – as well as opportunities to support pro-public education agenda items. Your voice will be important to influence the outcomes on key legislation. Please consider how you can engage in the grassroots advocacy process to have your voice heard.

We need to be ready to be a strong voice and united champion for K-12 public education while advocating for the ISBA 2021 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 us continue to collectively elevate our advocacy efforts to ensure a successful budget and to inform, influence, and shape sound education policy to support the more than 1 million Hoosier students in public schools. Much is at stake!

### **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 before, 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.

One bill comes to mind from the 2019 session to illustrate what the strength in numbers of school board

members speaking up and out at the right time, and with a unified message, can achieve. Senate Bill 246 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!

Some might be inclined to think that their personal efforts will not make a difference, but this perspective leads to apathy. Apathy leads to inactivity, or passivity. Passivity subsequently leads to passage of legislation detrimental to public education. If we are not passionate to defend the pillar of American democracy, then why should we expect legislators to share our views and positions? 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 2018-2022 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 am 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)
- ✓ Live legislative update webinars (once per month)
- ✓ Call-to-action legislative alerts (as needed on critical issues)
- ✓ Website resources
- ✓ ISBA Advocacy Guide (third edition available on the Legislative Services page of the ISBA website)
- ✓ 3rd Annual State House Day (February 9, 2021; more details below)

The first step in effective grassroots advocacy is to get informed. Preparation will make you a more confident and successful advocate. There are many resources available to help you build your knowledge base. The Legislative Services page of the ISBA website includes key resources to follow the 2021 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 Advocacy Guide

The ISBA Legislative Services page is located at: <http://www.isba-ind.org/legislative.html>. The Indiana General Assembly website is naturally the best resource to track the activity of the legislature and is located at: <http://www.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 2021 ISBA Legislative Priorities
- ✓ Know your area legislators: go to the IGA “find your legislator” website link: <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/find-legislators/>
- ✓ Tracking ISBA Legislative Services/LAN communications and providing timely updates on legislative session activities at school board meetings. We suggest making this a regular board meeting agenda item
- ✓ Identifying 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
- ✓ Coordinating email, phone call, or letter writing campaigns to your area legislators, media, and the broader community, especially in response to call-to-action alerts
- ✓ Organizing 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 Talia Bynm at: [tbynmm@isba-ind.org](mailto:tbynmm@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 going to 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 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.



## 2021 TENTATIVE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### JANUARY 29

Ensuring Safe, Secure, and Supportive Learning Environments Webinar

### FEBRUARY 2 & 4

Effective Governance  
Board-Superintendent Relations

### FEBRUARY 9

ISBA Statehouse Day (Virtual)

### FEBRUARY 9 & 11

Speaking With One Voice Superintendent Evaluation

### FEBRUARY 23 & 25

Managing Social Media Parliamentary Procedure

### MARCH 2 & 4

Managing Disagreement Effective Communication

### APRIL TBD

Open Door Law  
Legislative Policy and Grassroots Diplomacy  
Policy Development and Maintenance  
Collective Bargaining and The Law

### MAY TBD

ISBA Spring Regional Meetings  
School Budget & Funding Formula Overview  
Foundational Statements and Strategic Planning

### JUNE 9

ISBA/IAPSS/IASBO Budget and Finance Seminar

### JUNE TBD

ISBA June School Law Seminar  
Community-Board Relations  
Crisis Leadership

### AUGUST 20

ISBA/IAPSS Collective Bargaining Seminar

### OCTOBER 11-12

ISBA/IAPSS Fall Conference

### NOVEMBER TBD

ISBA Fall Regional Meetings

### DECEMBER TBD

ISBA School Law Seminar

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

**COME TO INDY VIRTUALLY!  
STATE HOUSE DAY FEBRUARY 9, 2021**

Culminate your advocacy efforts and help ensure a successful legislative session for K-12 public education by participating virtually in ISBA's 3rd Annual State House Day. The State House Day event will include a briefing session on key K-12 education bills moving in the session, two legislator panels (one featuring the caucus leaders and one with the leaders of the education committees), and State House virtual office visits or calls with your area legislators. Because this is a live virtual event, we invite as many school board members to participate as desired, rather than just your board's legislative liaison as with the in-person event of the past two years. ISBA will be sending detailed information about this event, including registration, regularly beginning in January. If you have any questions about

the event, please contact Talia Bynm (tbynm@isba-ind.org) or me (tspradlin@isba-ind.org) with any questions.

**CONCLUSION**

Please take time to acquaint yourself with the full details of the ISBA 2021 Legislative Priorities and Foundational Statements. Resolve to write a letter, send an email, or make a call to your area legislators now and throughout the session. 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!" 🌟

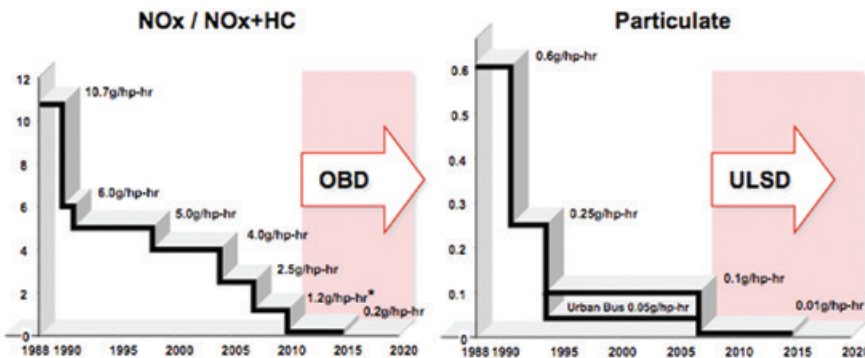
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