

STAT's **Top 5 Tips** for State-Level Advocacy

1 Know who represents you

Enter your home address at <https://fyi.capitol.texas.gov/Home.aspx> to find out who represents you in the Texas House and Senate and on the State Board of Education. Visit the House and Senate websites to learn their committee assignments.

2 Understand the roles and responsibilities of each elected official

To communicate effectively with elected officials, it's important to understand who is responsible for which issues. When it comes to public education, the Texas Legislature is responsible for issues related to school finance, the minimum teacher salary schedule, Teacher Retirement System (TRS) programs, your contract rights, overall testing requirements, etc. In general, all curriculum matters, including revision/adoption of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), fall under the purview of the State Board of Education (SBOE).

3 Rely only on information from reputable sources

Rumors fly around the state when it comes to education issues. It's important to rely and act on information only from trustworthy sources, such as STAT, TEA, your general education association (e.g., ATPE, TCTA, TSTA or Texas AFT) or reliable news outlets, such as The Texas Tribune or your community newspaper. If you can't directly source a social media post to a reputable organization, please consider it with some skepticism.

4 Cultivate a relationship with your elected officials

- Make sure to vote—elected officials can look up to see when you last voted.
- Attend public events, such as coffees, roundtables, public speaking events, etc., and introduce yourself.
- Let them know when they've impressed you through a letter or email.
- If you read an article that reminds you of something they said, send them either a link or a hard copy.
- Follow them on social media. Repost and retweet their posts, making sure to tag them. Let your network know how proud you are to be represented by them.
- Go to the source! Contact your elected officials directly with any questions you have, asking them to please explain or elaborate. Follow up with a thank-you letter afterward, and post on social media (tagging them) to let others know how helpful they were in answering your questions or listening to your concerns.
- During meetings, be on point, polite and specific. Don't assume they know what you know (very few are former educators). Remember: Their time is valuable!
- Always refer back to the best interests of the students, not you the educator.
- Tell them a relatable story from your classroom.
- Ask! The worst they can do is say no—and if they say no, find out why so you can come back later with a better proposal.
- Remember that phone calls, emails, letters, and in-person visits are recorded by staffers, so although it might seem that nobody is listening, they are taking note of the message you impart.

5 Serve as a resource for elected officials

Again—elected officials must make decisions about a wide range of issues. They need constituents to guide them! Volunteer to be a resource for them on science education issues.

TEA also routinely seeks nominations for volunteers to be part of various committees. This experience will provide opportunities to meet and interact with many personnel from a variety of TEA departments.

STAT's **Top Tips** for Local Advocacy

How to Cultivate Relationships with Administrators and School Board Members

It's important to build relationships with your district administrators and elected officials before you go to them with a problem or ask for something.

- Attend your school board meetings. You will learn about the board members' priorities and perspectives, and you will let them know you appreciate the fact they are volunteering for this duty!
- Don't ask for a laundry list of items. Instead, focus on one issue and craft a message that clearly states the issue and how it affects students! Campus and district administrators rely heavily on data to make decisions—include all relevant data to support your request or concern. If you have a solution that requires funding, do the research on how much it would cost to implement and include possible funding sources.
- Always make sure your message is crafted as positively as possible, and avoid negative comments on issues, especially on social media. The professional approach is always best.
- A great way to get your message across and get noticed is to bring in awards and grant money. If you receive an award from outside of your district (such as a STAT award or a scholarship to CAST), be sure to tweet the news and send a press release to your communications department. The best way is to sponsor your students as they win awards, create amazing products, or participate in innovative experiences. The fine arts and athletics departments are great at this, and we need to take a page from their book!
- Invite the superintendent, school board members, and your State Board of Education (SBOE) representative into your classroom to observe a lesson or to judge an event (let them know they will be given a rubric to follow).
- Post pictures with a description, such as "Science in Action," on your school's and/or district's social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).
- Create events on the school's and/or district's social media and invite elected officials as well as everyone in the community to attend (e.g., Science Night). Post pictures of the superintendent, school board members, SBOE rep and other elected officials participating in an activity at the event, thanking them for taking the time to get involved. (Make sure to tag them on social media.)
- Write an article for the school or district newsletter/paper letting others know what's happening in the classroom. Include pictures!
- Get to know and follow your district's "chain of command" in a positive and professional relationship. When you need help with an issue or another voice to add to a request, your science coordinator might know the next person to enlist, and so on, until your idea can make it up to the superintendent. Having a professional relationship with district leaders can be very helpful in moving your ideas up the chain of command.
- Share science content and instructional articles on social media to support other educators. (Tip: Follow STAT on Facebook and Twitter!)