



ADVOCACY STRATEGY COMMITTEE Report No. 23-031

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Developing an Advocacy Strategy – Potential Initiatives

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PURPOSE:

1. To discuss and explore advocacy practices and priorities as part of the development of an advocacy strategy to guide and support the work of the Board of Trustees for 2023-2024.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. Effective governance is a priority of the Board. Creating a formal advocacy strategy will continue to help move the work of the Board to a higher level of governance and provide a foundation for the 2023-2024 Board work plan. The advocacy strategy should be aligned with the objectives identified in the strategic plan.

CONTEXT:

3. The Board recognizes the need to work collaboratively and strategically with a common purpose in mind with other levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal levels as well as the coterminous boards and advocacy and community partners) in order to effectively use resources to ensure students' needs are best served across the District.

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board established the Advocacy Strategy Committee on 23 April 2019 whose mandate is to develop an annual advocacy strategy and advocacy positions and to advise and support the chair on specific advocacy issues and key messaging as needed.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. What is Advocacy?
“Advocacy is an active support for an idea or a cause – advocating for a change and thereby creating inspiration for the change. It can take many forms, but includes speaking up and drawing attention to an important issue. It may also involve influencing decision-makers. It usually involves the interests of specific groups or organizations and the interests of the government. In education, advocacy often revolves around topics such as funding, special needs, early childhood education; the common denominator being the interests of students

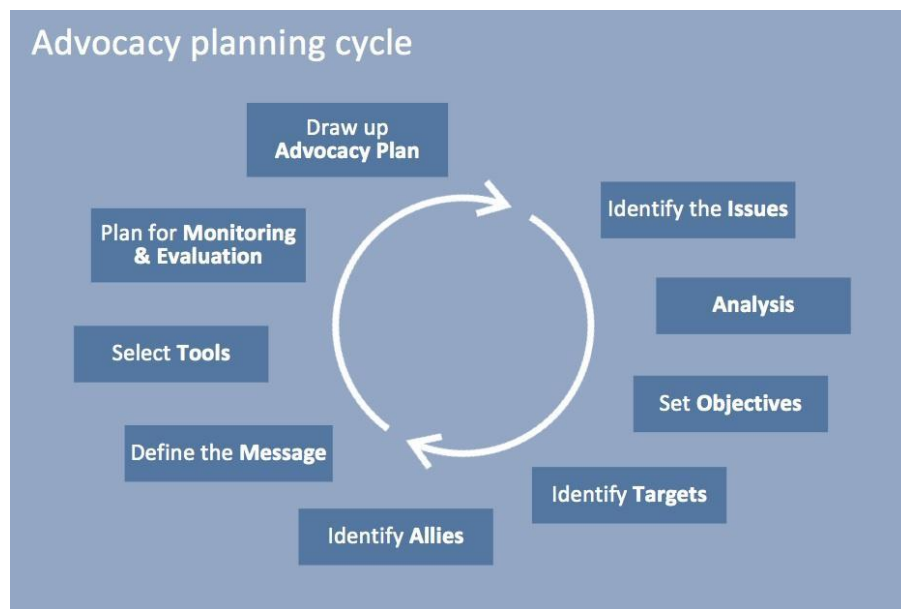
and the value of publicly funded education; in essence advocating for a better world for Ontario's young people”.

This definition of advocacy comes from the Ontario Education Services Corporation (OESC) Trustee Professional Development Program which includes a program module on advocacy specifically designed for school board trustees. A copy of the module is attached as Appendix A. As noted in the module “*By speaking out and advocating for the interests of school boards within the publicly funded education system, the Board can help to influence government decisions in support of student achievement and well-being.*”

A good advocacy strategy requires the careful delineation of goals; the capacity to put the larger good before individual interests; considerable investment in relationship building; established regular meetings and activities; and the organizational capacity to be flexible and responsive to opportunity.

5. Developing and Implementing an Advocacy Strategy

The following diagram provides a visual representation of the steps in developing an advocacy strategy:



- **Identify what you want to change?** Identify and analyze the issues, understand the issues, how they affect your organization, how they affect others;
- **Set objectives** – Identify what you want to accomplish, assess and allocate the resources required to achieve the objectives;
- **Identify targets and allies** - identify your target audience and potential allies, recognize that there might be primary and secondary audiences and allies. Know who the people are; who can have influence over what it is you want to do and include them in your approach;
- **Assess risk and define mitigating actions** - there may be risks associated with your advocacy, especially if the issue or the timing of the advocacy is

- sensitive. There may also be a risk of not taking action. The assessment of risk will help to guide what tactics are most appropriate to use;
- **Define the message** – develop clear and specific messages tailored to your audience, targets and timelines;
 - **Set targets** – establish key dates and milestones to work towards; and
 - **Monitor progress, update and review your plan** – success in advocacy requires continuous monitoring and refinement.

Developing an advocacy strategy is not necessarily linear/direct; there needs to be flexibility and sometimes it may be necessary to move ahead or go back and repeat steps based on things such as changes to the political environment. Issues and context will change constantly, so that continuous re-strategizing may be required.

The constraints on school boards with respect to advocacy should be considered when developing a strategy in order to be most effective. An advocacy strategy can be an important tool for effecting change to support student achievement and well-being, but the strategy has to be designed around and within available resources.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

6. There are no immediate financial implications anticipated with the development of an advocacy strategy. However, there is a significant human resource component to advocacy work, both in the planning and the execution. Unlike many organizations of similar size, school boards are generally under-resourced in this area.

There could be additional financial implications if an external consultant were retained to support the advocacy work and if the implementation of the strategy involves participation in meetings outside of the city such as with the Minister of Education in Toronto.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

7. This will be the first official meeting of the Advocacy Strategy Committee to brainstorm on ideas around the development of an advocacy strategy. Based on discussions at these Committee meeting(s), the Committee will present its recommendations to the Committee of the Whole for discussion and recommendation to the Board with possible approval by the end of September 2023.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Advocacy Strategy Committee:

- What is our advocacy goal?
- What are the specific objectives that will contribute to the achievement of the overall advocacy goal?
- Who are the key allies that we might partner or collaborate with?
- Who are the targets you need to influence to achieve our goals?
- How does this work connect with the Board's strategic objectives?
- How will this work benefit students?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Trustee Professional Development Program, Module 10: Advocacy:
Engaging the Public