

## Why Advocacy Matters for Charter Schools

While advocacy with your neighbors and friends is important, so they better understand charter schools, **advocacy with lawmakers is critical.**

**Advocacy with lawmakers matters because lawmakers decide if charter schools exist, the laws under which charter schools operate, how charter schools are funded, and general public education policies.**

**Your advocacy is needed so lawmakers have direct knowledge of charter schools** and have professional and political relationships with those who govern and manage charter schools.

If we want chartered public schools to thrive, **you must voice your support to lawmakers.**

## What is an Effective Advocate

- **Know your beliefs.** Effective advocacy of charter schools begins with understanding what you believe and care about:
  - Why is public school choice important to you?
  - Why are charter schools important to you?
  - What difference have chartered public schools made for you, your child, and family?
  - What benefit has a charter school made in your community?

The answer to these questions provides the basis for responding to why you support and advocate for charter public schools.

- **Know who your legislators are.** Identify your state representative and state senator. If you do not know who they are, all you have to do is enter your street address at: <https://www.gis.leg.mn/iMaps/districts/>
- **Learn about your legislators.** Do a little research on your legislators, like what neighborhood or community they live in, how long they have been in the legislature, what committees they serve on, and what issues are they passionate about.

- **Know the basics about the issues.** Know the basic facts about issues you will be talking to legislators about. What are the supporting arguments? What are the opposing positions? Be ready to give supporting evidence that backs your opinion.

**The MN Association of Charter Schools is your resource** *for information about the legislative process, your legislator's position on charter schools and other education issues, the issues being considered by the legislature, and legislation being promoted by the Association.*

**The MN Association of Charter Schools is your voice with lawmakers** *throughout the year, providing professional representation and advocacy at the State Capitol.*

## How to Advocate Effectively

### Contact Your Legislator

- **When the legislature is not in session:** Legislators will normally give you more time when not in session, so this is the best opportunity to personally visit and have a one-to-one conversation with your state legislator(s). It is also the best time to invite them to visit/tour your school, to speak with students, to a meeting with teachers or parents, or to participate in a school event. These out-of-session visits are great opportunities to share your school's story, to build a relationship with your legislator, and to let them know that your school community members are informed citizens who want to be engaged with them in talking about education issues.
- **During the legislative session:** The time legislators have is normally limited, as constituents and lobbyists want to talk about a full range of issues the legislature is dealing with. So, it is important to maintain your contact with your legislators.
  - Watch for updates from the Association on important legislation that would affect the charter school community
  - Be ready to spring into action when an action alert is issued. Timing your message is incredibly important in terms of having an impact as normally there is a short window of time that the legislature focuses on any issue.
  - Utilize the information and materials the Association provides to craft your personalized message via a phone call or email to your legislators.

Contact our office if you need assistance in messaging or arranging visits or meetings with your legislators.

# GUIDE FOR TELLING YOUR SCHOOL STORY

Stories are one of the most effective tools to build and maintain relationships. Not only does your school have a story, but every teacher, staff member, parent, and student have their own personal story that led to them choosing your school. When someone is asked why they chose your school, it is important that everyone can tell their personal story and how it is connected to your school's history, mission, innovative foundations, and place in the bigger narrative. A community with a common story is a powerful tool in advocacy.

**Three things that your school's story should be able to do:**

1. Be clearly **understood** by any audience
2. **Resonate** with any audience
3. Reflect your school's **mission**

**To start crafting it, ask yourself the following questions:**

1. Why was your school created?
2. What makes your school innovative?
3. How does your school serve its community?

If you can **simply** answer these three questions, you will have the start of a great school story.

**In telling the story it is important to:**

**Keep it personal:** What brought you to this school? What keeps you there?

**Share what makes your school special:** What community does your school serve? What unique programs and innovative programs does your school offer?

**Highlight the successes of the school:** What has your school community achieved? What goals have your students surpassed?

**Know your audience and your "ask":** What is your "ask"? Know what is an appropriate "ask" based on the audience to whom you are speaking.

**Make it a habit to share your story with others; whether they be colleagues, parents, students, friends, and neighbors so you are comfortable in telling your school's story, so that you and others in your school community have a consistent message.**

*Adapted from "Hosting a Successful Legislative School Visit Toolkit" – National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.*