



Supporting Professionals and Promoting Quality

MnAEYC-MnSACA Advocacy Toolkit

Why it matters that you are involved

GETTING STARTED

What Is Advocacy?

Advocacy is the pursuit of influencing outcomes that directly affect people’s lives and is the work and effort that contributes to the betterment of others.

Why Advocate?

Because public policies at the national, state, and local levels have a tremendous impact on the financing and quality of early childhood education and school age care, like reimbursement and compensation of professionals and services by providers, and on supporting the system infrastructure needed to deliver quality programs for all children. It is the job of policymakers to represent you – the constituents who voted them into office. Therefore your opinion on issues is extremely important to them. If they don’t respond to your viewpoints, they are likely to lose their jobs.

You are a key player in these ongoing efforts!

With just a little effort you can be involved in lobbying local, state, and national policymakers to affect the outcome of legislation that is positive for children and families. You

already know a lot about the needs of families and the work your organization does to meet these needs. Share these thoughts with your representatives, including: local school board members, the mayor and city council members, county officials, and state and federal legislators.

Make your voice heard and you will make a difference!

Know Who Represents You.

Legislators shape policies that affect many aspects of our lives, so it’s important to know who they are. It’s best to start at the state level, due to the large impact that legislative decisions have on you.

The quickest and easiest way to find your legislator is to visit <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/districtfinder.aspx> and click “District Finder.” Once you reach the next page, insert your street address and zip code in the space provided. Then click on Search. A map of your legislative district and your state and federal representatives and senators will appear. You can click on any of their names to be taken to their webpages, where you will find their contact information.

MAKING THE CASE

Develop Your Message.

Effective messages help advocates talk about the values and benefits of early care and education and school age care in ways that will increase public support for investments.

MnAEYC-MnSACA will put together its legislative platform each year. This will include the items we wish to see legislative changes on. We will also provide talking points to help you communicate with legislators.

Make It Personal.

In addition to using key messages, it’s helpful to begin from your personal experience. Legislators like to know what’s happening in their communities.

Tell them:

- How your program has been affected by legislative decisions.
- What issues your families face.
- What you are doing to provide high quality learning experiences for children in your program.

Advocacy can happen in 10 minutes or last a lifetime.

The goal of advocacy is to build an ongoing relationship with the elected officials who represent you. Policymakers are just like the rest of us – when they have a personal relationship with someone, they rely on their opinion and judgment to help them understand policy issues and know what the best choice is. We need to help legislators and the Governor know that the best choice is to invest in Minnesota’s children.

There are a variety of ways to build an on-going relationship with policymakers and to raise awareness of early care and education and school age care issues.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Letters

Letters provide much of the fuel that powers the legislative process. A stack of mail relating to a particular issue, especially if the letter is handwritten, is very influential with a policymaker, so if possible send letters regularly and in mass. Many times, your elected official will write you back. Avoid writing to legislators outside your district, unless you have a personal relationship with them or they are on a committee that is dealing with your issue.

Meetings

A group meeting with your legislator or other elected officials is the most effective way to communicate your message. Whether it’s held in someone’s home, at a program’s site, at the Capitol, or at a neutral setting, a meeting with a representative is chance to connect on a personal level.

Phone Calls

Phone calls are best utilized when you want to let your elected official know whether you support a piece of legislation or to have a one-on-one conversation. It also allows you to connect more with the office staff, who are key allies when working with elected officials.

Email

Email is probably the least time-consuming method to deliver your message, but it is the least personal and therefore, a less effective way to connect with public officials. If you send an email, be sure to put your address in the subject line, so they know immediately that you are a constituent. If you get to know your legislator, this can often be the best way to communicate.

Media

Media attention is a great way to get noticed by both elected officials and the community. Your representative and their staff monitor hometown newspapers, so any mention of a program in a letter to the editor, an editorial, a featured article, or in photos, can be clipped and sent to your official’s office.

Elections

Connecting with candidates for public office and participating in elections-by getting involved in your party’s precinct caucus, attending candidate events and VOTING, are all important ways of influencing policy decisions.

If you have 10 minutes...

- Share the MnAEYC-MnSACA Public Policy Agenda with the families in your program.
- Read the MnAEYC-MnSACA policy updates and take action where you can.
- Call or write your State Senator and Representative.
- Subscribe to your legislator’s email newsletter through their House and Senate webpages.
- Like your legislator’s Facebook page or follow them on Twitter.

Ready for more?

- Join MnAEYC or MnSACA or both!
- Join the MnAEYC-MnSACA Policy & Advocacy Advisory Group.
- Attend Youth Day and Voices for Children Advocacy Day at the State Capitol.
- Invite elected officials to tour your program.
- Set up a meeting with your State Senator and Representative.
- Send program celebration or event invitations to your State Senator and Representative.
- Write your local paper about the importance of investing in our children.
- Participate in campaigns.

If you have questions about any of the action items in this toolkit or how to be an effective advocate, please contact Sara Benzkofer, Director of Policy and Communications, at 651-789-3590 or sarab@mnaeyc-mnsaca.org.

A variety of sources were used to create this document, including Ready 4 K’s, NAEYC’s and MCCA’s advocacy toolkits.

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