

How Parents can Advocate for Quality School Library Programs

ORGANIZING

- Ask to meet with your child's school librarian and discuss ways you can help.
- Offer to organize a Parent Advocacy Committee.
- Offer to organize a library fundraiser or special program.
- Be a liaison between the library and the local PTA.
- Invite other parents, the public librarian, business people, and influential community members to work with you.

DEVELOPING YOUR PURPOSE, MISSION, OR MESSAGE

- Discuss with the librarian and possibly the principal what role a parents advocacy group should play in helping to improve the school library program.
- If you are trying to reduce proposed cuts, seek help from relevant organizations (PTA, PSLA, etc.) and use resources they have on their websites (see page 2).
- Keep your message positive and focused on better education and library services for students.
- Perhaps you would like to start by offering to organize an evening literacy program with the librarian in conjunction with National Library Week or Read Across America Day.
- It is important to articulate a clear purpose when you begin to seek other parents to participate.

COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE

- Frame your advocacy around the PA PTA's **Position Statement on Public School Library Programs**. Instead of saying "I feel that...", a stronger position would begin with "the Pennsylvania PTA of which I am a member endorses...."
- Speak to your principal about strengthening the school library program and information literacy skills for your children's future.
- Write letters, blog to the local newspapers, or send postcards to decision makers telling them why school libraries and your plan in particular is important for education.
- When you are launching a letter writing campaign or speaking at a board meeting, focus on a key issue. Stick to your "talking points." Always be gracious and say thank you.
- Communication IS critical and many times a handwritten note outweighs a mass-produced email or postcard. A personal visit is even better; make an appointment, and bring along printed material that staff can read later. When you finish, be sure to summarize and send a thank you note after the visit.
- Attend town hall meetings and be prepared to make a statement in defense of your child's library program.
- Attend board of education meetings, ask questions, keep your child's library program at the heart of education, thank board members if they are strong supporters of the program, be prepared to educate them if they are not strong supporters.
- Remember, venting seldom accomplishes anything, but if you arm yourself with data and suggested ways to resolve a situation, decision makers will listen. [Note: Librarians are good researchers! Ask them for help.]

WEB RESOURCES

Am. Assn. of School Librarians. "AASL Crisis Toolkit." AASL, 2011.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslissues/toolkits/crisis.cfm>

Am. Assn. of School Librarians. "Parent Outreach Toolkit." AASL, 2011.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslissues/toolkits/parentoutreach.cfm>

Am. Assn. of School Librarians. "Quick Links for Parents." AASL, 2011.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aboutaasl/aaslcommunity/quicklinks/parents.cfm>

Am. Assn. of School Librarians. "School Library Program Health and Wellness Toolkit." AASL, 2011.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslissues/toolkits/slmhealthandwellness.cfm>

Friends of the Libraries School (FOLUSA) "How to Organize a Friends of the Media Center/Library Group." <http://libweb.mansfield.edu/upload/kachel/FOLUSA%236.pdf>

Pennsylvania Dept. of Education. "Library Resources."

http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/library_resources/8722

includes the current school library guidelines

Pennsylvania School Librarians Assn. "Legislation Pages."

<http://www.psla.org/index.php/legislation/legislation>

Pennsylvania School Funding Campaign <http://www.paschoolfunding.org/>

Talking Points at <http://www.paschoolfunding.org/2011/03/our-latest-talking-points/>

Great Advice on Budget Cuts

"In this time of limited resources, educational leaders are faced with unenviable decisions. They have to make cuts. These are decisions that they do not want to make, but have to make. They try to make informed decisions that will minimize the negative impact on students. Cuts can happen to excellent programs where the librarians have done everything "right" and more. School districts cannot spend money that they do not have. What can we do? We need to make a conscious effort to avoid making business decisions personal. It is imperative that we do not back the unfortunate administrators into corners. We do not want to force administrators to rationalize and defend library cuts. We need to continue making connections between the district's educational goals and how the library plays an essential role in meeting those goals. We need to show our support for the district by providing information that will assist them with the data they need to make informed future decisions regarding the support of students and learning through library services. Our job is to offer support, assistance and data that will help decision makers make informed decisions prior to cuts and to support their efforts to ultimately bring back positions after cuts. Messages have to be about students and student learning; they cannot be about the jobs of librarians. Schools are not in the business of employing librarians; they are about students and learning."

From the American Association of School Librarians' "AASL Crisis Toolkit:"