Advocacy

Course

Advocacy is a Relationship [12:05]

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About

- Learn best practices for following up with your decision makers.
- Learn different ways to share your successes.
- Learn the importance of being positive in your messaging.

Transcript

Advocacy is all about relationships. Relationships develop over time and require listening with an open mind. As relationships strengthen, trust builds and the chance of your advocacy message being well received grows. In this lesson, we will review best practices for following up after a meeting, we will learn why it is important to share successes with your decision makers and remind you to stay positive in your interactions with potential supporters and decision makers.

People are more likely to listen to and believe those they trust, according to Ann Ewbank, established relationships will lead to your decision maker viewing you as a potential partner. The more you communicate with them, the more likely they will take your views into consideration. There are many ways that you can communicate and build relationships with your decision makers. Being proactive and positive is always the way to go. But how you communicate can vary widely.

One of the easiest and more common ways to follow up is to send a Thank you email here. You can promise to send periodic updates and briefly and succinctly reiterate your goal and how it aligns with your decision makers goal. This is also a perfect time to invite your decision maker to visit the library and participate in library activities. Whether it's checking out a new book or attending a literacy night.

Do you currently prepare a library report? If you don't, you should consider it. A report that details the impact the library has on the school community can be invaluable in demonstrating that impact to stakeholders. Your report can be monthly, quarterly or annual whatever works best for you and your audience. The format can be simple or creative. If you do a search for "school library annual report," you will be sure to find a variety of examples.

No matter how you format your report or how frequently you prepare it, you'll want to include the following information. Circulation statistics and accompanying research on the importance of choice. Collections, statistics and accompanying research or policies on the importance of a diverse and up to date collection. Incidents of library instruction with connections to the curriculum and standardized testing. Incidents of teacher and librarian. Collaboration and cooperation, including examples of student work, are curated resource lists. Lists of content area and library skills taught with relevant standards, cited activities and events in the library, and their benefit to student academic achievement. Budgets spent and they're positive impact on the library. Stories are quotes from library staff, learners, parents or other educators.

Presenting a variety of information will make your report more interesting and demonstrate the breadth of supports the library provides. Reports do not need to be flashy, but graphs, charts and visuals will help make it more interesting to look at and thus more likely to be read. Graphs and charts also help the human brain interpret data meaningfully. Keep in mind that report should be positive. They are not a time to air grievances or bring up complaints or issues. They are an opportunity to demonstrate the positive impacts of the library to learners and educators and the entire school community.

You want to be passionate, vocal and persistent, but you don't want to cross the line into nuisance. If you call an email incessantly, your input is more likely to be dismissed. No one wants to read the 10th email from the same person that week, no matter how compelling it may seem. Following up with letters, communicating reports, sharing events, and inviting your decision makers to visit your library and participate in library activities are all important means of communicating and building relationships. Just be sure to space them out appropriately.

As we discussed in a previous lesson. There are lots of ways you can stay connected with your decision makers. Formal letters and reports are just the tip of the iceberg. Sharing your library's successes is a great way to strengthen your relationship. You can share student work with them, whether it's putting together a gallery of student work or sending a specific example to their office. You can share research articles that promote school libraries. Just be sure to provide a summary of the report in case they don't

wish to read the whole thing. You can shared library resources, anecdotes that exemplify the library's impact and be sure to forward along any media that pertains to the library, such as social media postings, an article in the school newsletter or coverage on the local news.

One of the most useful methods I have found at the site level with principals was to shared library resources that they would find useful. So when a new book was added to the professional collection, I would give the principal a first look at it and a first chance to check it out. If they had children of their own. I would share a new book that their child might enjoy if I knew that as a school, we were struggling to raise math scores. I would put together a curated list of math games and activities available online and in the library and share it with the school community.

Stories, anecdotes and quotes can be some of the most effective examples of how the library positively benefits learners and educators. These can be as simple as anonymous reflections learners have shared during library lessons, testimonials from educators who have collaborated with the librarian, or quotes from parents who appreciated a library run event providing a quick survey or a feedback box after a lesson or activity. Is a simple and effective way to gather this sort of feedback.

Photographs of student work learners and educators engaged with library resources. Learners working and reading in the library and people participating in library events are always a positive and useful thing to share independently or as part of a library report.

In all of these examples, one of the most important things you can do is to thank your decision maker for any way that they have helped make these things possible. If you spent library funds that were allocated by your principal, say thank you for the library budget that made your purchase possible. If your curated guide was inspired by a district initiative, thank the school board or superintendent for their initiative. However you share successes or deliver thankfulness, making these connections not only make the decision maker feel good, but demonstrate that you are utilizing library resources in a way that supports the community and its goals.

I'm sure you've heard the phrase you can catch more flies with honey than vinegar. This proverb can easily be applied to advocacy.

There are certainly times when you need to share your concerns and goals. If there weren't, you wouldn't be advocating. However, presenting those concerns in a positive light is critical to success. A librarian that wishes to encourage their administrator to refrain from cutting library positions should present all the fabulous things that the librarian can do. The librarian can certainly mention what will be lost, but the focus should be on the positive impacts of the desired outcome. Deb Levitov suggests framing your message so that the beginning and ending are both positive. It helps to remember that advocacy is a request, and "biting the hand that feeds you" is just as unwise as catching flies with vinegar.

Librarians must stay visible and share their knowledge with their decision makers. If you have not told your legislator, administrator or elected official what the library does to support students, it's unlikely that they know you must connect and inform and do so before there's a specific advocacy need. Being proactive in this way will ensure that the relationships and a foundation for influence and information exists before an emergency arises. Communicating your successes and sharing library resources will also help you practice promoting, artic

ulating and sharing the impacts of the library program. Being proactive also means doing your research so that you are prepared to speak to each decision maker, determine who your decision makers are, identify their values as they pertain to the library and its goals, collect data and prepare to present it and develop a coalition of other advocates who can speak for the library. Once you have a specific goal in mind, you can put all that great work to good use and outline it in your advocacy plan.

Whether it is following up with your decision makers to Thank them for their support, sharing your library successes, or finding positive ways to communicate. Advocacy is a relationship that requires time and energy, creating an advocacy plan and making sure the plan is a living document that can grow and adapt as situations change will help you stay on track and focus your efforts where they will do the most good.

Activities

Develop an Advocacy Plan

An advocacy plan is an outline of what needs to be done, who needs to do it, and when it needs to be done. Putting together a plan and making sure that plan is a living document that grows and adapts as situations change will help you stay on track and focus your efforts where they will do the most good. If you do not have a specific advocacy goal in mind, practicing with a mock plan is tremendous practice to familiarize yourself and be ready when the need arises!

RESOURCES:

REFLECT & PRACTICE:

Throughout this course, we have looked at the many steps involved in creating an advocacy goal, finding supporters, delivering your message, influencing your audience, and working with an advocacy committee to strengthen your reach outside of your library building. Now you're ready to look back at your advocacy goal and craft your plan. Starting on page 10 of the Course Packet (found in the Resources above), Deborah Rinio has laid out the guidelines based on ALA's *Frontline Advocacy for School Librarians Toolkit* to help you develop your own advocacy plan.

Course Packet

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bibliography.

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