

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERS

About the Community Advocacy Project

As a public school employee, one of your most important opportunities is to advocate for the needs of your community's public school students, families, and taxpayers. This can mean communicating with policymakers, raising awareness on important issues, and even advocating for legislative changes. But as a school employee, how do you ensure you're representing the true needs of your community, and how do you bring people along on that journey? The truth is that your greatest opportunity to advocate for public education as an individual is at the local level where you have the opportunity to listen, collaborate, and influence positive and productive changes to strengthen public education. The Community Advocacy Project seeks to help school board trustees and community members as they engage with their communities and empower others to become advocates.

Why Should You Engage Your Local Community in Advocacy?

- First, local community members deserve a voice in improving our public schools. The success of our public school students impacts the futures of families, businesses, and society at large. So why wouldn't we start by discovering what's important to our local community? When we listen to people, we often earn their trust and desire to help as future advocates.
- Second, while statewide legislative issues can seem daunting, real stories of school districts' successes and challenges often compel elected officials to act. Parents, teachers, students, business leaders, faith-based leaders, and others are the best people to tell their stories and encourage elected officials to do the right thing for our students and communities.



Step-by-Step Guide to Sharing Your District's Story

Advocating for your district means being able to share your district's story, including successes and challenges. Here's how to effectively share your district's story:

1 Why Community Advocacy Matters for Special Education

As an employee in your district's special education department, you have a unique perspective to share with families, community members and business partners about the importance of meeting the needs of all students — and why that matters.

There's a long list of state and federal protections that have been developed over decades to ensure public school students with special needs or disabilities have the appropriate academic supports and related services. Being able to talk about the successes and challenges of your district's special education program is key to building awareness and understanding around this vital program.

In effect, you serve as an ambassador of your district's special education program and should always look for ways to inform your community about the value of that work.

When you're engaging with others about your district's special education program, you'll also have the opportunity to listen and answer questions. Those authentic conversations will help create goodwill and give others the information they need to speak up and share positive news about your special education program.

The goal is to help others understand the value of special education so they can work alongside you in advocating on behalf of students who rely on this vital program.

2 Identify Key Messages

The Heart of Our Communities

For many communities, the school district is the largest employer in town. This means you play a pivotal role in multiple aspects of community life. Showcase the opportunities your district provides students and their families.

List at least five examples within your own district.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Educational Excellence

Share accomplishments from your district, including academic achievements and unique and innovative programs.

List at least five examples within your own district.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



Did you know?

73% of responding Texas public school districts communicate with their local media regularly regarding the districts' accomplishments and challenges.

Source: TASB Community Advocacy poll

Step-by-Step Guide to Sharing Your District's Story

2

Identify Key Messages, cont.

Student Success

Share stories of students who are excelling in academics or extracurricular activities. You can also share the successes of your district's graduates.

List at least five examples within your own district.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Dedicated Staff

Emphasize the commitment of your teachers and staff who go above and beyond to support students.

List at least five examples within your own district.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Safe and Supportive Schools

The safety and well-being of our students and staff is a top priority. Highlight how your district follows detailed protocols and procedures that work together to create safe schools.

List at least five examples of safety measures within your own district.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

3

Share the News With People in Your Community

Once you have identified the key highlights of your district, it's time to strategically share this information with members of your community.

Engaged Parents and Families

Family support is essential to the educational experience. Find opportunities to share this information with families that are volunteering, participating in parent-teacher organizations, and attending school events. Regularly communicate this good news with them to build trust and loyalty.

Key Staff Members

Include your staff members in sharing your district story. Staff members can add their own personal stories and experiences that resonate with people in your community. With the knowledge they have about your school district, they can help build strong connections and build an even larger network of school supporters.

Connected Community Leaders

Reach out to local business owners, city leaders, and other influential community members. Invite them to school events and ask for their input on school initiatives. Seek partnerships that benefit both the school and the community.

Alumni Network

Stay in contact with your district's alumni. Highlight their achievements and encourage them to give back to the school, whether through mentoring, fundraising, or advocacy.

State Legislators

Develop a list of the lawmakers who serve the community. To find the legislator who represents a certain address, visit fyi.capitol.texas.gov.

Additional Ways to Share Your District's Story

Additional Ways to Share Your District Story

Use the following avenues to showcase great news in your school district.

Social Media

Post articles, photos, and videos about your school district on popular social media channels like Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube. Use hashtags related to your school community to boost post visibility.

Student Voice

Students are the heartbeat of our schools and why you do what you do. They provide an authentic experience that can resonate with their peers and can influence community perspective. Consider creating a video campaign for students to record short testimonies that can be shared online or with prospective parents. They can talk about their favorite class, an impactful teacher, or a memorable unique experience from your district.

School Website

Publish articles, announcements, and events on your district and campus websites.

Staff 'Road Show' Concept

Have a district leader visit each campus to share a presentation on good news from across the district. This presentation can be held during an all-staff meeting. Staff will take note of a district leader taking the time to talk to them about marketing the district. If staff do not know about all the opportunities you provide students, they will not be able to promote the district as effectively.

Community Partnerships

As you share information about your district with business partners, encourage them to write op-eds about their positive experiences in your schools. Leaders in your community that position themselves as a supporter of your public schools can be seen as positive publicity.

PTA Participation

School leaders should regularly attend PTA meetings. By attending meetings, you are showcasing your partnership with parents. Leverage their connections with other parents and help spread the word about opportunities in your schools. When parents speak highly of their child's experiences, it adds credibility to your district and sets an example of how parental engagement can benefit schools and students.

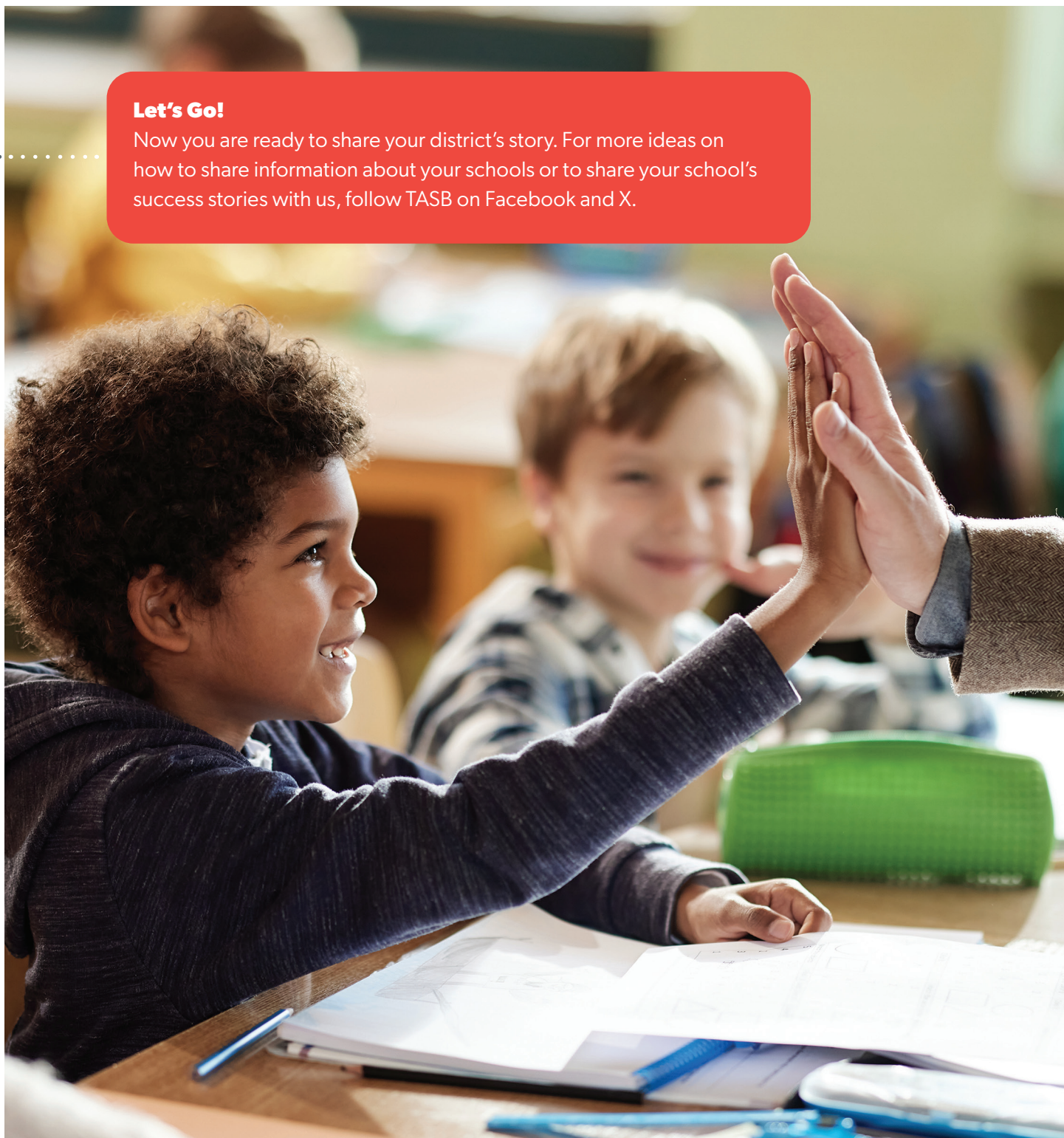
Newsletter

Send out regular communications to parents and community members through a digital or printed newsletter.

Additional Ways to Share Your District's Story

Let's Go!

Now you are ready to share your district's story. For more ideas on how to share information about your schools or to share your school's success stories with us, follow TASB on Facebook and X.



This resource is adapted from the TASB Toolkit for Community Advocacy. The full toolkit is available online at tasb.org.