



# Heroes for Advocacy: Tools to Promote Your Mission

Denise Carter, M.Ed.  
TASB Student Solutions



# About Community Advocacy

Community Advocacy helps schools **connect** and **engage** with their communities and **empower** others to become advocates.

This can mean:

- Communicating with policymakers
- Raising awareness on important issues
- Advocating for legislative changes



# Engaging Your Local Community



Why should you engage your local community?

1. Discover what's important:
  - **earn trust** and
  - give them a **voice** in improving public schools
2. Sharing real stories of successes and challenges often **compels elected officials to act.**



# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 1: Why Community Advocacy Matters for Special Education



As a special education team member, you offer a vital perspective on why meeting the needs of all students matters.

With decades of laws securing services for students with disabilities, you understand these protections — and can help others see why they matter.

Your insight helps build support for special education and encourages others to advocate alongside you.





# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 2: Identify Key Messages



Districts can showcase real stories of success or challenges to demonstrate how your special education team works. Key messaging could include:

- Heart of Our Communities
- Educational Excellence
- Student Success
- Dedicated Staff
- Safe and Supported Schools



# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 2: Identify Key Messages

### Heart of Our Communities

Districts 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.*



# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 2: Identify Key Messages

### Educational Excellence

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

*List at least five examples within your own district.*



# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 2: Identify Key Messages

### 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.*





# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 2: Identify Key Messages

### 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.*



# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 2: Identify Key Messages

### 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 within your own district.*



# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 3: Share Within Your Community



Strategically share this information with members of your community, including:

- Engaged Parents and Families
- Key Staff Members
- Connected Community Leaders
- Alumni Network
- **State Legislators**



# Steps to Sharing Your Story

## Step 3: Share Within Your Community

### Reaching your state legislators

- Develop a list of the lawmakers who serve the community.
- Find the right legislator representative at [fyi.capitol.texas.gov](https://fyi.capitol.texas.gov).
- Invite your community to reach out to state legislators.



# Additional Ways to Share



1. Social Media
2. School Website
3. Newsletter
4. Community Partnerships
5. PTA Participation





# Download Resources

## A Beginner's Guide to SHARS

How to get Medicaid reimbursements for services you're probably already providing.

Is your district participating in SHARS and looking to get a basic understanding? If the answer is yes, this article is for you.

Let's get this out of the way: SHARS is complicated even by Medicaid standards. The good news is that it's well worth the effort to recoup funds for your school district.

### What is SHARS?

First, let's define SHARS.

Medicaid services provided by Texas school districts to Medicaid-eligible students are known as School Health and Related Services (SHARS). SHARS allows Texas school districts to get Medicaid reimbursement for certain health-related services documented in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

SHARS is overseen through a cooperative effort between the Texas Education Agency and Texas Health and Human Services Commission (THHSC).



Learn how TASB School Medicaid Services can help with funding for your district. Contact us at [shars@tasb.org](mailto:shars@tasb.org)

### Does Your District Qualify?

Probably. Currently, about 950 out of roughly 1,004 eligible school districts in Texas are enrolled in SHARS. Participation is voluntary, but why not recoup some of the funds for services your district is likely already providing?

What Are the SHARS reimbursement criteria for students who qualify?

- Are 20 years of age or younger
- Medicaid eligible
- Meet eligibility criteria for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Have IEP services

Students can qualify if they are covered by SHARS. Students must be provided services by personnel who are employed by the school district.

- Assessment
- Audiology
- Counseling
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Psychology
- Special Transportation
- Speech Therapy

## 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.



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Ready to take the next step?  
Download *Community Advocacy for Special Education Leaders*.

Sharing with non-special education teams? Download our *Beginner's Guide to SHARS*.