

The ABCs of Educating Policymakers

As stewards of your Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) grant, it is critically important to share the impact of this initiative with policymakers. Within the context of the technical assistance you have received from the SS/HS Communication and Social Marketing Center, the ABCs provide a step-by-step approach for educating policymakers about the SS/HS initiative.

Ask

Be prepared

Communicate clearly

Ask

- **Ask for a small group of volunteers to reach out to policymakers.** This group might include SS/HS core management team members as well as representatives from other SS/HS grant sites in your state. Identify and secure 3rd party champions (e.g., parents, police, principals), and other stakeholders to act as spokespersons, especially for visits to legislators' local offices. Group visits (3-4 people), especially those that include 3rd party champions, can create greater perspective and enthusiasm in sharing your story than visits from a single individual.
- **Ask who your key policymakers are.** Who would you like to inform (at the local, state, and federal legislative and government agency levels) about the successes of your SS/HS Initiative? Find legislators: state legislators at <http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=17173>; United States House representative and home page by entering your zip code (<http://www.house.gov/>); United States Senators and their home pages by state (<http://www.senate.gov/>); other information can be found at <http://capwiz.com/naspweb/dbq/officials/>
- **Ask if there might be a personal connection** between members of your outreach group (or other educators, partners, family, friends, etc.) and the policymakers. If appropriate, use this connection in your request for a meeting.
- **Ask about and research the specific interests of policymakers** and their record on issues related to the SS/HS elements. Visit your members of Congress' Web site home pages to read their statements, press releases, and position papers. Watch the videos of speeches they have posted on their Web sites. Find the alignments between SS/HS and their priorities. Identify what you have found successful from SS/HS that might be of greatest interest to them. Keep in mind you want to educate them, NOT ask for funding.

- **Ask about which SS/HS grantee sites are in the policymakers' district or state.** There is strength in numbers; invite these other sites to participate in the visit with you, or at least refer to the magnitude of the impact in the policymaker's district or state.
- **Ask for a meeting.** Call, e-mail, write a personal letter, or fax (as per the Congressional or state office preference) your policymakers to request a meeting to share the success of your SS/HS initiative. (See *Writing to Your Member of Congress: A Template*) Arrange to meet with your legislators at their local offices, state office, or in Washington, DC. If the legislator is unavailable, arrange to meet with his or her Education, Mental Health, and/or Family or Children's Issues Legislative Assistants. Staffers are important resources and act as the "eyes and ears" of legislators. If possible, plan to meet with several legislative assistants at the same time. (For a list of legislative assistants, see a legislator's Web site or *Congress at Your Fingertips* at <http://publishing.cqrollcall.com/>)

Selected resources:

- United States House of Representatives: find your representative and his/her home page by entering your zip code (<http://www.house.gov/>)
- United States Senate: find your senators and their home pages by state (<http://www.senate.gov/>)
- National Conference of State Legislators: find links for your state legislators by clicking on your state and "home page" (<http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=17173>)
- National Association of School Psychologists: find more information about your legislators (<http://capwiz.com/naspweb/dbq/officials/>)
- Legislative assistants list: see legislators' individual Web sites or *Congress at Your Fingertips* (<http://publishing.cqrollcall.com/>)
- Writing to Your Members of Congress: A Template (http://sshs.promoteprevent.org/sites/default/files/writing_to_congress_template.doc)
- *Celebration Kit* messages, worksheets, and templates (<http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/Communications/toolkit/celebrationkit2007.aspx>)

Be Prepared

- **Be prepared with a clear and concise message** about the successes of your SS/HS initiative, including how your partnership's systems approach has supported achieving outcomes. Begin with those programs, services, or issues that align with the

policymaker's priorities, e.g., reduce crime, lower substance abuse, improve educational outcomes such as test scores and graduation rates, reduce teen suicide attempts, decrease costs through increasing efficiencies. See the *Communicate Clearly* section below for guidelines about creating messages.

- **Be prepared to speak like a pro.** Conduct spokesperson training for your outreach group. Assign talking points based on people's strengths. Practice role-playing to deliver your message.
- **Be prepared to answer questions.** Consider the research you have already conducted. No matter what your policymaker's priorities, it's safe to assume you may be asked how your initiative aligns with their priorities. For instance, if the policymaker has a track record of fiscal responsibility, you can anticipate that you may be questioned about the cost-savings that SS/HS programs and services have produced.
- **Be prepared with a brief presentation,** such as your own YouTube video, an Animoto (a video slide show), or the SS/HS *Show Me How* video to show policymakers, using a laptop or tablet device such as an iPad. Remember that presentations are an opportunity to once again align your SS/HS initiative with your policymaker's priorities and stated values.
- **Be prepared with a fact sheet** (two-sided) about your SS/HS initiative to leave with the policymakers (See customizable *SS/HS Fact Sheet Template*). A fact sheet is an important part of your educational outreach. It provides policymakers and their staffers a way to refer back to your work. Don't forget to include your Web site and contact information on it.
- **Be prepared to be on time.** Find out ahead of time where offices are located. If you are visiting your Congressional Representative and both of your Senators on the Hill, make sure you allow enough walking time between appointments (approximately 20 minutes) to arrive promptly.
- **Be prepared to make—and leave—a good impression.** Bring business cards so that policymakers and staff will be able to follow up with you.

Selected resources:

- *The SS/HS Interim Report of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative: National Evaluation FY 2005 and FY 2006 Grantees*
(http://sshs.promoteprevent.org/sites/default/files/sshs_interim_report_-_2005-2006_cohorts.pdf)

- Customizable 2-page Fact Sheet template based on *Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative: A Legacy of Success* – http://sshs.promoteprevent.org/webfm_send/2295
Show Me How Video <http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/initiative/commercial.aspx>
- *Celebration Kit* messages, worksheets, and templates
<http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/Communications/toolkit/celebrationkit2007.aspx>
- *The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative: A Legacy of Success* - http://sshs.promoteprevent.org/webfm_send/2278
- The ABC's of Educating Policymakers about Safe Schools/Healthy Students webinar archive, June 23, 2011 <http://edc.adobeconnect.com/p5gf3ldqzqb/>

Communicate Clearly

- ***Communicate that you appreciate their work.*** Kick off your message by acknowledging some work that the legislator has done that aligns with your SS/HS initiative's work. You can reflect your appreciation for their values (e.g., fiscal restraint, early childhood development, safer communities), and/or specific legislation they have authored or publicly supported. This meets your audience "where they are," indicates your respect for your legislator, and opens the door for your audience to be more receptive to what you have to say.
- ***Communicate the purpose of your visit,*** e.g., to tell them about the problems your community has faced, your approach to these problems, the successes you've seen as a result of your SS/HS initiative, and your conviction that this model can succeed and be sustained by communities nationwide.
- ***Communicate the most compelling information*** about your initiative. What has worked best? Include the human stories of how SS/HS programs and services have positively affected students' and families' lives.
- ***Communicate the outcome and impact data*** that demonstrate the effectiveness of your SS/HS program (your two-page SS/HS fact sheet).
- ***Communicate two examples of valuable systemic and lasting changes*** that will live beyond your grant.
- ***Communicate succinctly.*** Stay on message, and assume you will have no more than 10 minutes at the office. Answer questions to the best of your ability. If you don't know the

answer, say so and promise to obtain any information or data that was requested. Don't promise what you cannot deliver.

- **Communicate with the future in mind.** In other words, **Ask... again.** Use this first meeting as an opportunity to develop a relationship with your legislator and his/her staff. You can do this with a brief "ask" that sets the stage for follow up outreach and education. For instance:
 - **Ask legislators to visit your community and schools** to see the SS/HS programs in action. Invite them to an upcoming community event or create a special event that might motivate them to attend (e.g., an awards dinner at which they are publicly thanked, or a press conference around an issue of importance to them like bullying) (See *Sample Invite Letter*).
 - **Ask when is the best time/what is the best way to communicate** with the office again regarding the future successes you will want to share.
 - **Ask if there is any additional information** their office would like to have about the work of your initiative. If there is no immediate request for information, let the office know that you are happy to help answer future questions they might have. Follow-up promptly on any promises made during your visit.
- **Communicate your gratitude.** Thank everyone you meet for his/her time. Write thank you letters reminding the legislator and/or staff that you are an available resource to speak about the issues of youth violence, substance abuse, school safety, and mental health in your state.

Selected resources:

- The ABC's of Educating Policymakers about Safe Schools/Healthy Students webinar archive, June 23, 2011 <http://edc.adobeconnect.com/p5gf3ldqzqb/>
- *Celebration Kit* messages, worksheets, and templates
<http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/Communications/toolkit/celebrationkit2007.aspx>

Examples of SS/HS sites that have done outreach to policy makers

Marianne Peltier-Allison, Project Director, Alamance-Burlington System's CARE SS/HS Initiative, Burlington, NC (2002)

During the Alamance-Burlington School System's CARE (Community Coalition-Assisting, Responding, and Educating) SS/HS Initiative, Project Director Marianne Peltier-Allison met with

North Carolina Senator Elizabeth Dole and her staff in Washington, DC. The meeting continued a dialog started a year earlier regarding the initiative's bullying prevention efforts, ways to improve the state's efforts to reduce bullying and violence, and how such programs might fit into a national agenda. Senator Dole's staff helped Ms. Peltier-Allison meet with North Carolina Senator Richard Burr, a member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pension. He valued the insight from Alamance-Burlington and invited updates.

Barb Winters, Project Director, Allamakee County Community Connections SS/HS, Waukon, IA (2004)

Barb Winters and other leadership, partners, and local evaluators of the SS/HS school districts in northeastern Iowa capitalized on numerous opportunities to educate their local, state, and federal policy makers about their SS/HS initiative and the data that supported positive outcomes for youth. The Community Connections SS/HS leadership forged relationships with state and federal legislators, and took advantage of opportunities to meet at their offices, with staff in the federal home office, and when they were in Des Moines and in Washington, DC.

When their SS/HS leadership team attended a meeting in Washington, DC, they scheduled a meeting with Senator Harkin to share the great work of SS/HS in Allamakee County. The team—comprised of a superintendent, the project director, a community leader serving on the SS/HS advisory board, and a coordinator for one of the school districts—met with Senator Harkin and a legislative assistant for education and community. After they shared the goals and programming of their initiative and that they were in the process of data collection, Senator Harkin asked if they could provide him with their data when it was available. The local evaluation team and Allamakee County Community Connections partnership later produced a bound book entitled “For Kids Now, For ALLamakee Tomorrow,” which provided a background of SS/HS, their mission and vision statements, and data relevant to their initiative. Later that year, the project director, a high school student, and a parent were selected to attend training on leadership development in Washington, DC. They met once again at Senator Harkin's office, this time with the legislative assistant, and provided the follow-up data that Senator Harkin had requested. He followed up with them by asking further questions.