A guide to establishing relationships with legislators to advocate for public education

- Kris Amundson and Lori Grivna -
The Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD) was founded in 1974 and its mission is to advocate for metropolitan school districts and advance legislation that supports student achievement.

AMSD serves 41 K-12 school districts, 5 intermediate/educational cooperative districts and 2 integration districts that collectively enroll more than half of Minnesota’s public school students.

AMSD’s Board of Directors is comprised of the superintendent and one school board member from each district.
ABOUT AMUNDSON STRATEGIES

• Amundson Strategies is a public affairs and government relations firm offering its clients high quality services in the areas of strategic communications, legislative advocacy, alliance development and community relations.
• Kris Amundson and Lori Grivna work closely with AMSD and its members to advocate on behalf of public education.
Relationships with Legislators -

Don’t be a stranger.
Strive for ongoing, regular communication. Be familiar to them.

Be personal.
Let legislators know how proposals directly impact your district.

Be human.
Use real examples, i.e. your district’s special education cross-subsidy is $XX amount.
- Establishing Relationships -

Be the early bird.
Reach out to legislators now to talk about the state of your district.

Don’t assume.
Legislators may not be experts on education policy or school finance.

Communicate on their terms.
Ask what they prefer: Emails? Calls? Meetings in person? School visits during legislative breaks? All of the above?
- Establishing Relationships -

Show, don’t just tell.
Invite legislators into your schools and classrooms to observe and participate in various activities or unique programs.

Participate.
Each year, AMSD member districts meet for a day at the State Capitol.

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- Maintaining Relationships -

**Relationship inventory.**
Determine existing relationships with legislators — especially new ones. College connections? Board member connections?

**Social media love.**
Keep your social media positive. Always.

**Heads up!**
Share significant news about your district — positive or negative — with your legislators before it hits the media.

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Say THANK YOU

Whether on social media, a letter to the editor, or a personal note, legislators appreciate hearing how the work they do has impact — and they appreciate you sharing that news with public recognition.
Know the AMSD Platform.
Share it with your legislators. And then provide your local examples.

Be consistent.
Consistency increases effectiveness. Keep themes consistent so that all of your advocates communicate the same message — staff, parents, board members, legislative action coalitions, etc.

Repeat. Then repeat.
Repeat the messages but in different delivery forms (meetings, emails, handouts) and messengers (Supt. board members, parents).
Ongoing Communication -

Meet regularly.
Ask legislators if they’d be interested in a regular meeting time. Your concerns will be better received later in the session — during final negotiations — if you have established an ongoing relationship.

Stay informed.
Follow what’s happening at the Capitol through AMSD updates.

Keep legislators informed.
Add legislators and staff to your newsletter/press release lists.

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- Ongoing Communication -

Keep AMSD IN THE LOOP

Let us know if you are coming to the Capitol, if you are asked to testify, have a legislative interaction or glean information that could be helpful in our advocacy work.
Ongoing Communication

**Prioritize.**
Provide clear, concise talking points. Don’t bombard or overwhelm legislators with too much information.

**Be Relevant.**
Make sure your information is up to date and timely.

**Be Responsive.**
Always be available for questions or to provide additional information. Know your facts and keep your interactions positive and clear.
Provide TESTIMONY

If you are asked by your legislator or AMSD to testify on a bill, offering your district’s story can make a significant impact. We can help.
Learn the guidelines.
Committee staff is responsible for setting agendas for each hearing and will establish guidelines for testimony and speaking orders.

Prepare.
AMSD can help you prepare your testimony in advance and have testimony handouts ready for the committees.

Be brief.
Know your time — testimony is often limited to 2-3 minutes.
- Effective Testimony -

Be clear, concise, and specific.
Try to avoid repeating testimony, and give specific examples.

Know where you stand on the issues.
Be clear about whether your are testifying in support or opposed to legislation. Typically there is testimony offered from both sides.

Know your audience.
Review the committee membership, and work with AMSD to anticipate questions.

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Committee Rules and Practices

Understand decorum.
Start your testimony when directed with “Thank you Madame/Mr. Chair,” and state your name and title. Testimony and Q&A should go through the chair of the committee.

You are on the record.
All committee hearings are open to the public and record.

Never guess.
It is better to say you will get the information than to guess an answer.
Effective Legislative Advocacy

ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS
Reach out now. Be clear and specific. Communicate on their terms.

MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS
Make relevant connections. Meet regularly. Say thank you!

ONGOING COMMUNICATION
Visit the Capitol. Keep messages consistent. Participate.

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