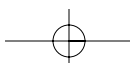
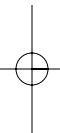


# **Political Advocacy for School Librarians: You Have the Power!**

**Sandy Schuckett**

**Linworth**  
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Dedicated to my parents, Max and Bluma Schuckett, who read to me from the beginning, and to the children and young people of the United States, who will be the winners when they have access to strong school library programs.

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people  
can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

- Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, 1928

# Introduction

A Google search using the keywords “school libraries” + “advocacy” resulted in 6,590 hits; and using the keywords (without the quotation marks or commas) “school libraries” + “politics,” “school libraries” + “history,” and “school libraries” + “legislation” garnered similar results. After perusing many of the hits and reading information from several of the 50 states, one realizes that school libraries still need help, even though positive outcomes have occurred throughout the country. The positive outcomes have usually been the result of strong and well-organized political advocacy by library media specialists, in collaboration with school administrators, parents, teachers, students, publishers, vendors, and the community at large.

Here are some examples of gains that have been made and work yet to be done:

**Maryland, 1998:** “*School library funds*—(1) In this subsection, ‘new local school board funds means additional funding provided by the local school boards for elementary school libraries in excess of the fiscal 1998 funding provided by the local school boards for elementary school libraries . . . (5) The State Superintendent shall establish guidelines and criteria for the expenditure of funds under this subsection. In developing guidelines, priority shall be given to updating library book and other resource collections” (“House Bill 434” n. pag.).

**Iowa, 2001:** “It is important for all school library media specialists to become active participants in the lobbying efforts to reinstate the requirement for school library media specialists back into the *Code of Iowa* . . . The following resources have been developed to assist you in your lobbying efforts. Please note that these pre-made letters are not intended to be used verbatim, so please feel free to modify” (“Legislative Issues” n. pag.).

**New Mexico, April 18, 2002:** “HJM 54 Public School Library Materials was heard by the House Education Subcommittee and received a ‘do pass’ recommendation. They were unable to act on it before the session ended . . . Introduce (again) a Memorial in the State Legislature to have library materials funded from the same line in the state education budget as textbooks. It was introduced this year, but never reached a vote as the session ended. The goal is one book per student” (“General Membership Meeting” n. pag.).

**Kansas, November, 2002:** “SCHOOL FINANCE LEGISLATION is a major concern. More than significant cuts are expected . . . We need to lobby heavily for a tax increase to fund K-12 education. Non-mandated programs are always considered for cuts. If school budgets are cut, school library programs are cut” (“Current Legislation and Regulation Issues” n. pag.).

**Massachusetts, December, 2002:** “Massachusetts education policy makers are not supporting the power of school library media centers to help students achieve. There is great inequity in access to quality literature, information, and library professionals in schools throughout the state . . . The MA Department of Education has no administrator designated to provide leadership and set standards for school library media programs statewide. Neither MA education reform legislation nor the MA Board of Education provides specific funding, leadership, or plans for improving public school library media services. The progressive decay of library media programs in many MA schools has compromised the success of education reform” (“Legislation” Massachusetts n. pag.).

**Colorado, 2002:** “The State Grants for Libraries Act (SB00-85) was passed and signed into law in 2000. Since then, this act has provided needed educational materials for more than 290 school, public, and academic libraries annually . . . In 2002, because of an anticipated shortfall in state revenues, funding for State Grants to Libraries program was eliminated. Enabling legislation remains on the books, but no money to purchase resources is available” (“The Impact of State Funding for Libraries” n. pag.).

**Indiana, 2002:** “The second portion of the reading initiative that relates to early reading, the School Library Printed Materials Grant, provides a dollar for dollar match to local school corporations to update school libraries and purchase new books. The goal of the original 1997 portion was to purchase two books per student per year. The grant program grew from \$4 million for the 1997-1999 biennium to \$6 million for 2001-2003. Nearly 226,000 books were purchased by the fall of 2002” (“Improving School Libraries” n. pag.).

**California, 2003:** “You saved the Public School Library Act line item last year with your phone calls, letters, and visits detailing why we need to be a separate and distinct line item. We need to do it again! Come back and check the CSLA Web site regularly for alerts on what other action is needed. The students of California are depending on you” (“Legislation” California n. pag.).

**Texas, 2003:** “The Texas Education Agency has included funding in the amount of 30 cents per student for school library materials through Rider 62 in its Legislative Appropriations Request for 2004-2005. The funding source

for this program is available federal and state discretionary funds. However, given recent budget reductions, it is unlikely TEA will have sufficient unexpended federal or state discretionary funds to cover the cost of this program” (“Texas Library Association” n. pag.).

. . . and finally,

**South Carolina, 1927:** “In 1904 a library act was passed which resulted in the establishment of small book collections in some rural schools. The salient feature of this act ‘to encourage the establishment of libraries in the public schools of the rural districts’ was the provision of an appropriation of \$5,000 annually by the state to be offered in small amounts to schools raising an equal amount, which, in turn, must be met by a third like sum from the county board of the applying school . . . The law is still on the statute books but it is inoperative. Since 1927 there has been no state appropriation to support it” (“The Libraries of South Carolina” n. pag.).

It seems the more things change, the more they stay the same. The quotes reflected above, and many more, show that for some reason school libraries and the people committed to their excellence in providing the best for students and teachers have had a constant struggle in the area of securing funding for materials and staffing. Even though several studies since the 1960s have pointed to the connection between strong school library programs and higher student achievement, the powers that be on local, state, and national levels still just do not seem to get it. Strong grass roots advocacy on the part of library media specialists and their friends and supporters has always played an important part in whatever successes have been achieved. Even during crucial budget deficits and other bad times strong school library advocacy has often prevented funding from being obliterated altogether.

The purpose of *Political Advocacy for School Librarians: You Have the Power!* is to empower school librarians and their colleagues within the school community (and the larger community) to become leaders in advocating for school libraries in the political arena on local, state, and national levels. (Note: The term “librarians” or “school librarians” will be used throughout this book to denote professionals who hold a specific school library certificate or credential. This will include library media specialists, library media teachers, library media coordinators, library teachers, teacher-librarians, or whatever other term a particular state education agency, school district, or school uses for these professional educators.)

Chapter 1 covers the rationale for getting political, and explains why political advocacy is essential in today’s climate in the state houses of the nation and in Washington, DC. Chapter 2 helps to remove the mystique from the targets of advocacy: school board members and local, state, and national

legislators, and provides tips for establishing good relationships with them. Chapter 3 discusses the message: how to create strong messages using current research as significant ammunition, how to create good sound bites, and how to formulate the answers to tough questions. Chapter 4 provides tips on delivering the message, including how to write lobbying letters, how to speak before boards and committees, and how to be comfortable when meeting legislators or their staff people in person. Chapter 5 covers participation in library legislative days on the federal, state, and local level, what to expect, and how to enjoy the experience. Chapter 6 presents some success stories from colleagues around the country, which will show how leaders in the advocacy effort accomplished notable results by working through their schools, school districts, local and state teachers' associations, state school library associations, and state departments of education, and how technology presented itself as a helpful tool.

Political advocacy works. You have the power. Use it!

## Why Listen to Me?

I voted for the President of the United States at the age of five. The year was 1942, we were at war, and on Election Day in early November my dad took me into the voting booth with him. I already knew how to recognize the letters of the alphabet, and using the small rubber "X" stamp, I followed my dad's instructions and placed the stamp first on the inkpad, and then "next to the name that begins with the letter 'R'" on the paper ballot. This simple act was the beginning of the making of a true "political junkie."

I was fortunate to grow up in a home where the issues of the day were constantly discussed at the dinner table. I had involved parents who read up on the issues, joined organizations, wrote letters, made phone calls, always voted, and felt that their voice counted when things needed to be changed. Political involvement and awareness was a way of life for our family. When I attended elementary school, I was also lucky to have several teachers who reinforced and enhanced what I was learning at home. Louise Budde, my fourth grade teacher, taught me to read carefully, loudly, and clearly. Faith Pascal, my fifth grade teacher, ran her classroom like a democracy. We voted on everything! We discussed, and discussed, and discussed. She taught us to listen, to think, to evaluate ideas, and to look for more information when we needed it. Juanita Parks in junior high school made us learn lists and lists of new vocabulary words. And Mrs. Wright (whose first name I have forgotten) was a stickler for correct writing. She even deducted points for every missing or misplaced comma!

Skip to 1978 when I was elected to be one of the 31 California delegates to the first White House Conference on Library and Information Services (WHCLIS) to be held in 1979 in Washington, DC. It was at this conference that

I learned of the tremendous power that grass roots advocacy could have in the ongoing struggle for support for all types of libraries. I had the good fortune to meet two people who had an enormous influence on the direction my life would take, and who both became my mentors. One was Bessie Boehm Moore from Little Rock, Arkansas, who epitomized for me what political action was all about. I watched her like a hawk, and ate up every word she said. I learned how to tell good stories, and how to not be intimidated by lawmakers, since they were just regular people. The other was Eileen Cooke, who was, at the time, the Director of the Washington Office of the American Library Association (ALA), and who taught us, step-by-step, how to make legislators aware of our issues, and how to persuade them to support the things we wanted. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to these two incredible women, who, sadly, are no longer with us.

After WHCLIS I, the White House Conference on Library and Information Services Taskforce (WHCLIST) was created. The Taskforce was composed of two delegates who were elected from each state's WHCLIS delegation in Washington, and its charge was to monitor the actions on the resolutions passed by WHCLIS. We agreed to meet annually, starting in 1980, in a different section of the country. At these meetings, my California colleague, a retired school administrator, and I, along with delegates from the other 49 states, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the American Indian Nations, learned the nuts and bolts of grass roots lobbying to be used on local, state, and national levels. Each year we had speakers who were experts in this arena, and we learned and practiced techniques, asked questions, and then went home and put into practice what we had learned.

In addition, the ALA began "Library Advocacy Now" training. These advocacy training sessions were held at annual and midwinter conferences, and provided information, resources, and techniques, which could be replicated at home in additional training sessions at state and local conferences, so that a large cadre of politically astute library supporters could be created and nurtured in each state. This training, in turn, led me to become more involved in the California School Library Association (CSLA) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), which I felt were the best vehicles for school library advocacy on the state and national levels.

On the local level, I was elected president of the Los Angeles School Library Association (LASLA) twice (ten years apart), and in both cases led advocacy efforts to maintain school librarians' jobs and to garner district funding for school library materials.

In 1992 I was elected CSLA Vice-President/Legislation, and began to seriously put into practice all of the things I had learned as we waged the ongoing struggle for support for school libraries in the state. A few years later, I was appointed Chair of the Legislation Committee of AASL, and soon after that, an Intern on the Committee on Legislation of the ALA.

The combination of being an officer on local, state, and national levels gave me a certain amount of clout, and enabled me to begin presenting sessions on political advocacy at conferences on all levels. As these presentations progressed over the years, I was able to refine them as a result of evaluations and feedback from attendees. Even as this was going on, I was continuing to learn from other people involved in advocacy activities. The lobbyists for ALA, CSLA, and the California Library Association (CLA), were also of invaluable assistance, providing me with information, tips on whom to contact on particular issues, and the best steps to take in specific situations.

The successes that occurred from advocacy efforts in the school district, state, and national arenas have prompted the writing of this book.

In California specifically, school librarians who had been relatively unaware of the power they had began attending conference sessions on advocacy. They realized that sitting around and complaining or whining did not accomplish anything, and instead they began to put that energy into writing letters, making phone calls, and visiting legislators. I was able to provide school library colleagues with advice along the way, sample letters to use as writing prompts, or bulleted lists of the major points of a specific message each time action was needed. The advent of technology made it all so much quicker, easier, and more efficient. In the mid 90s listservs were established, both in California and through AASL, so information could be disseminated immediately when action was needed. Listservs continue to be of incalculable value on local, state, and national levels.

Through the 1990s, California school library media folk were becoming more and more politically astute, and by 1998 the combination of that growing political acumen and a huge budget surplus on the state level made the passage of the California Public School Library Act of 1998 possible. The Act provided a distinct and separate line item in the annual state budget specifically dedicated to funding for school library materials and technology, and it was funded at \$158.5 million, or \$28 per student. This specific line item in the state budget was a huge boon for a state that had been 50th in state school library support ever since statistics had begun to be collected, and this success happened because of grass roots political advocacy on the part of school library people. Further, when the Act was threatened with extinction in 2003, California school librarians again came to the fore, and the line item, though reduced by 95% due to a huge state budget deficit, was maintained.

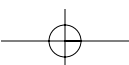
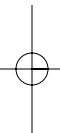
On the national level, I had the opportunity to work closely with the ALA Washington Office in helping to achieve the passage of the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Program (the Jack Reed [D-RI] amendment, with co-sponsor Thad Cochran [R-MS]) which became a section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization in December, 2001. Although the language of the amendment provides for an authorization of \$250 million dollars for school library materials and additional training of library

media specialists, only \$12.5 million in funding was approved by Congress in 2002. Again, technology helped through the AASLFORUM listserv. I was able to provide information when specific action was needed, and school library media supporters throughout the country contacted their U.S. Congressional Representatives and Senators urging them to support this important piece of legislation. Nevertheless, because of the current low appropriation, there is yet more work to be done.

So . . . why listen to me? Twenty-five years of experience in the political arena, with several successes and with the help of brilliant mentors, knowledgeable colleagues, astute library lobbyists, and, above all, building-level librarians who listened and made the choice to act have proven to me that knowing what to do, knowing how to do it, and then doing it really works.

I offer this book as a model for readers to use and adapt as you seek to grow into politically active advocates for strong school library programs.

*(Note: Throughout this book there will be references to Web sites on the Internet. At the time of publication, all of these links were functional. However, due to the dynamic and sometimes volatile nature of the Internet, URLs and the information contained on various Web sites is subject to change. Therefore the reader's understanding and indulgence is requested.)*



# 1

## Why Politics? Why Lobbying?

*Webster's New World College Dictionary* defines politics as “the science and art of political government,” and “the conducting of or participation in political affairs, often as a profession” (among others); and lobbying as “an attempt to influence a public official in favor of something” . . . “after the practice of meeting with legislators in the LOBBY” (“Politics,” def.). For history buffs, it was the lobby of the Willard Hotel, located on Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the Capitol in Washington, DC where, in the early part of the twentieth century, the movers and shakers gathered to meet with congressmen and senators to discuss relevant issues.

Traditionally, regular people never got involved in such endeavors. Organizations hired full-time professional lobbyists, often at high costs, to make their members' wishes and desires known to legislators, and to convince the legislators why it was necessary for them to support or defeat a given piece of pending legislation. Successful lobbyists made it their business to know everything there was to know about individual public officials and their staff members. Lobbyists knew how to approach each one, which types of arguments worked and which did not, and how people in decision-making positions responded to messages from constituents. Above all,

they knew the value of establishing friendly relationships with legislators and their staffs.

The Internet School Library Media Center (ISLMC) School Library History page <<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/libhistory.htm>> provides an overview of the development of school libraries in the United States—as an outgrowth of public libraries serving students. The first landmark model legislation for the establishment of school libraries was passed in New York in 1892, and as the twentieth century began, more and more school libraries began to emerge in states throughout the nation. In 1914 the ALA created the School Library section, and in 1920 ALA published the first standards for secondary school libraries. In 1930 ALA published *The Program for Elementary School Library Service*.

As time passed, through the Post-World War II era, more and more publications emerged, and by 1960 *Standards for School Library Programs* by the American Association of School Librarians in collaboration with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education was published by ALA. It was not until 1965, with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title II that federal legislation was firmly in place to provide funding for materials for school libraries throughout the nation. In 1974, ESEA Title IV was created, which consolidated school library funds along with testing plus counseling and guidance, and the strength of the original Act became diluted, as administrators in many places opted to hire additional counselors instead of spending the funds on school library materials.

The 1979 White House Conference on Library and Information Services, the largest White House Conference to that date, was a major impetus for encouraging librarians and library users from all types of libraries to become more involved in the political process on behalf of their libraries, and the focus for those involved with school libraries was to specifically earmark ESEA funding rather than have it continue as a consolidated grant to states. The different speeches and programs at the 1979 conference made it very clear that grass roots advocacy was the only way to garner support for libraries of all types on local, state, and national levels. Delegates learned that a team approach that utilized the expertise of librarians along with the desires of library users for optimum services had the greatest promise of success. The conference provided information, techniques, advice from the professional lobbyists in the ALA Washington Office, and suggestions for activating grass roots advocacy at home.

Viewing the Democratic and Republican political conventions on television in the summer of 2000 reinforced this notion: watching various guests' speaking styles, methods of delivery, the points they emphasized and those they ignored, and the audience members'

reactions was truly a political education—and very valuable.

One word that was almost entirely missing from both conventions was the word “library.” Only two speakers mentioned this word: Jesse Jackson recalled how, as a young man, he was denied entrance to the public library in his home town in South Carolina, and Susan Bass Levin, who was running for Congress in New Jersey remembered that her dad took her to the public library when she was a small child. None of the speakers mentioned school libraries at all. The speakers addressed various issues with great passion—health care, taxes, working families, and even education reform. How wonderful it would have been to hear the same passion addressed to the need for strong school library programs. It became evident in listening to the major platform planks of each party, as related to education, that school libraries fit into every plank: high standards, accountability, good teachers, safe schools, or family/business/community involvement in local school affairs. It was this last idea of enlarged involvement in schools that brought to my mind the phrase, “Activate for Advocacy.”

What does it mean to Activate for Advocacy? This is not a new or unique idea. Many segments of the population have been doing this for years, in both proactive and reactive ways in order to get elected officials to comply with their requests. For school library folk it means that we need to toot our own horns and to work as proactively as possible in assuring that parents, teachers, business owners, and other community members become our strongest allies in reminding legislators that strong school library programs are at the heart of any successful education endeavor. We now have an abundance of recent research to support our position on the need for adequate school library funding. Here is what needs to be done:

- Plug into demands parents have for schools: Produce kids who are good readers. Produce kids who can use technology. Use these two points as inroads to enlist parents’ help in political action for school libraries. Parents can become your most powerful allies and they can create an enormous interest in strong school libraries.
- Emphasize your school library program’s alignment with curriculum. Show how your program fits into local school priorities, district requirements, state standards and frameworks, and any national standards that are created in all curricular areas. It is important for you to know what these standards are, and how the library fits in; and this information must be transmitted to parents also.

- Emphasize what students need for life-long success: basic literacy, technology literacy, and information literacy. Make it very clear that the school library provides the place, the resources, the skills, and the expertise of a professional, which can help kids to become literate in these three areas.
- Include a specific goal in all advocacy efforts. Is it a specific amount of money-per-student for library materials or technology? Is it professional staffing—one professional library media specialist for every x-number of students? Is it adequate clerical or paraprofessional help in the library? Is it the creation of a school library coordinator position at the state level? Whatever the needs of your community, they must be specified clearly so that all members of the advocacy team are “on the same page” in all advocacy efforts.

As a school librarian, you have the opportunity to become a leader in the advocacy effort because you have a connection to every teacher and student in the school. Excellent programs in your library provide opportunities to meet and work with parents. You might also try to give presentations at PTA meetings and special events, or at local philanthropic organizations such as Rotary, Lions, Moose, Elks or other community clubs. Establish relationships with your principal and with other district administrators, and constantly provide information about your library program and its connection with literacy and with the curriculum. Keep school libraries always on the mind of all decision makers so that when specific issues arise those same decision makers will be more apt to be aware of the necessity for strong school library programs. Use your expertise in technology to improve communication among your colleagues and with your allies in disseminating information when it is needed. Make Activating for Advocacy an ongoing practice—as much a part of your job as ordering books or designing instruction for students, and learn many of the techniques that professional lobbyists use. Lastly, become a leader who can influence the future of school libraries in your school district and your state.

## Tips You Can Use Now

- **Meet** with your colleagues locally and brainstorm to determine which other entities in your community you need to “Activate for Advocacy.” Include the existing community activists (every community has them) and enlist their help in working for your goals. Input from your colleagues can help to identify exactly who these people are and how to contact them.
- **Make** a connection with the leadership of your local and state PTA groups. Offer to be on the agenda for a meeting to speak about school library issues.
- **Make** a list of local community groups who meet regularly or have special events. Assign the task of obtaining their schedules to one of your colleagues. Obtain commitments from your colleagues to personally contact one or more of the groups you have identified and arrange to speak to them about the specific school library issues that affect their children. Make a “who will do what by when” list and follow through on it.
- **Decide** on the major message for your school community. This message and the sound bites that go with it will convince everyone on the advocacy team that students need fully staffed and fully supported school libraries. Parents and community members can use this message when they contact decision makers with their requests and demands.
- **Create** a one-page, bulleted fact sheet that clearly shows the current state of school libraries in your community and what is specifically needed to bring them up to the high standards that students deserve.

