

School counselors as champions in advocacy: Update your advocacy skills

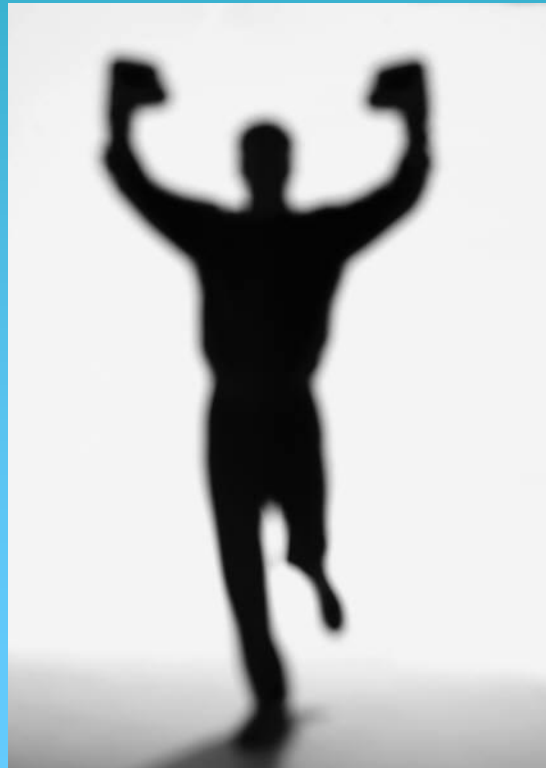
Becky Bowers-Lanier, EdD
VCA/VSCA Legislative Consultant
March 24, 2011

Expected outcomes

- An understanding of the importance of advocacy for school counseling and the children we serve
- Increased awareness of advocacy tools at the school counselor's disposal
- Re-commitment to advocating in today's political environment

What is advocacy?

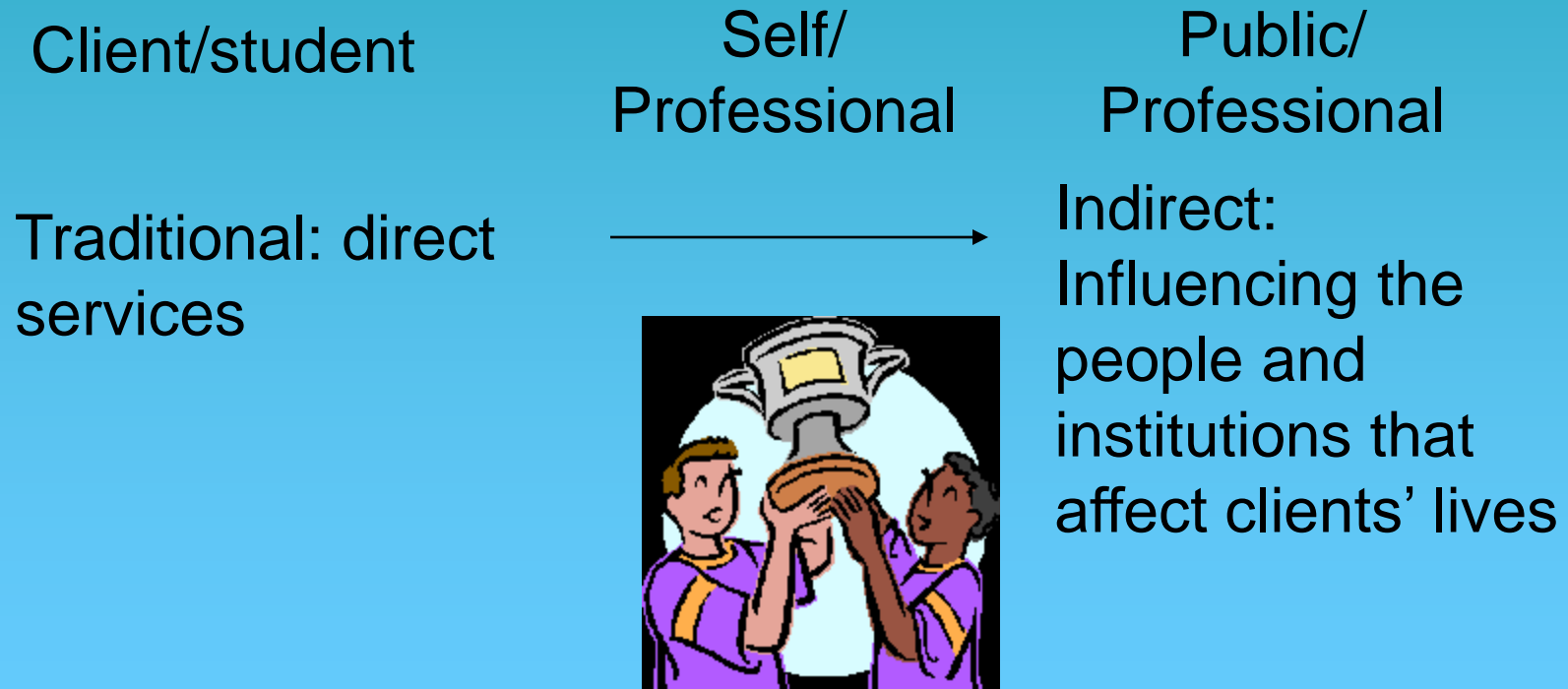
- Active verbal support for a cause or position



Why advocate?

- To eliminate barriers impeding students' development
- To create opportunities to learn for all students
- To ensure access to quality school curriculum
- To collaborate with others within and outside school to help students meet their needs
- To promote positive systemic change in schools

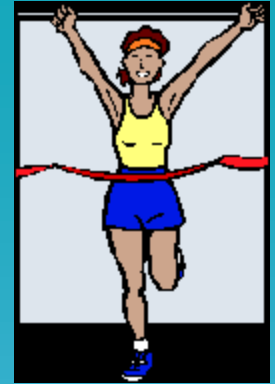
Advocacy on a continuum



Counselors are ideal advocates

- Nonjudgmental attitude
- Patience and persistence
- Genuine belief that change can be achieved for students, clients, groups, or socio-cultural issue
- Capacity to negotiate and communicate effectively
- Skills in leadership, collaboration, and participating and promoting in systemic change

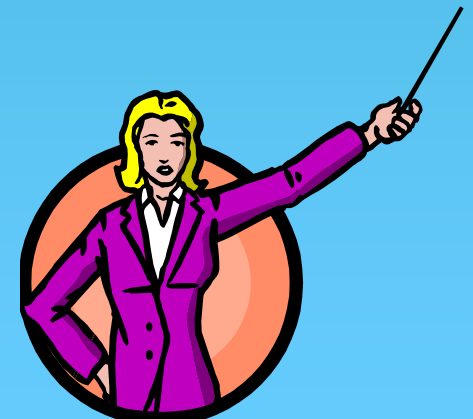
Public/professional advocacy involves



- Identifying problems that require intervention
- Establishing principles to guide a remedy
- Understanding related issues and clarifying policies needed to address them
- Developing a policy strategy
- Building coalitions and gaining power to win the policy change

Professional advocacy: tools for success

- Interpersonal skills
 - Ability to engage others in support of and in opposition to issue
 - Seek solutions that may not be the desired outcome: compromise
 - Active listener and assessor of others
 - Negotiator
- Collaborator
 - Engaging others in efforts



Professional advocacy: tools for success

- Self-knowledge and understanding
- Critical thinking



– Systems thinker

- Analyze interrelationships for issues at hand, especially as they relate to power, authority, and influence
- Analyze how a change in one part of the system will affect changes in other parts of the system

Professional advocacy: tools for success

- Risk taking
 - Knows how to use power in its various forms and is empowered
- Power:
 - expert, legitimate (positional), reward, referent, information, connection, coercive



Comparison of attributes for client and professional advocacy

Client

- Nonjudgmental attitude
- Patience and persistence
- Belief that change can take place
- Capacity to communicate and negotiate effectively
- Involves leadership, collaboration and participating and promoting systemic change

Professional

- Self-knowledge
- Critical thinker; understands systems
- Risk-taker
- Ability to engage others in support or opposition
- Effective communicator
- Willing to compromise
- Negotiator
- Uses power effectively

Client/student advocacy: exercise

Think of a situation in which you advocated for a student. Describe:

How you knew that advocacy was necessary

With whom did you advocate and why?

What was the outcome?

Identify your own personal attributes that promote effective advocacy.

What skills would you like to improve to advocate more effectively?

Professional advocacy: exercise

- Think of a situation in which you engaged in professional advocacy. Describe:
 - How you knew that advocacy was necessary
 - With whom did you advocate and why?
 - What was the outcome?
- Identify your own personal attributes that promote effective advocacy.
- What skills would you like to improve to advocate more effectively?

On becoming a professional advocate
in the public arena: The journey

How do you get to wherever
you're going? One step at a
time.



Four stages of public advocacy:

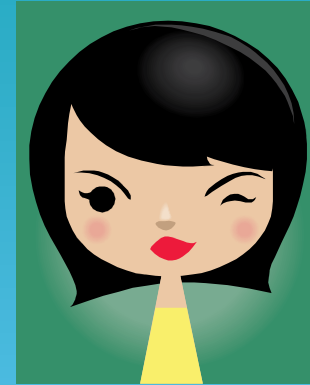
Stage 1: Buy-in

- an “aha” moment when the advocate decides to get involved
- Reactive: there is a perceived injustice or issue
- Advocate begins to deliberate over the injustice or issue in reaction to the precipitating event.
- Buys in.



Stage 2: Self-interest.

- Causative issue is related to “my” practice.
- Begin to develop a plan to deal with the problem.



- May seek support from others.



Stage 3: Political sophistication.

- Take advocacy to a more public venue.
- Promotes profession to legislators, policymakers, participates in political coalitions, testifies in committee meetings.
- Seen as the expert.



Stage 4: Leading the way

- Advocate directs the dialogue and policy development for issues greater than the practice of a single counselor
- Takes on positions of leadership within state and national organizations
- Runs for political office
- Serves in governmental positions



Why professional advocacy now?



Threats to K12 education

- The General Assembly has constitutional mandate to provide free public education.
 - Never has been fully funded.
 - Last year K12 cut by 12.5%
 - VRS used to infuse general funds
 - Political climate unstable
 - [HB 1416](#), the 65% solution
 - [HB 1792](#) and [SB 1270](#), SOQ and flexibility
 - Funding for K12

Budget amendments to K12 in 2011

- House would have cut \$93.1M to K12
 - Eliminated funding for resource teachers in grades 6 and 7, reduced funding for text books
 - Cut pre-K funding
- Senate
 - Added \$100.6M to K12
 - Eliminated 2% reduction in pay
 - Restored some SOQ funding for school operations
 - Put \$31M into VRS
 - Cut funding for Governor's merit pay plan from \$3M-\$1M

Final budget sent to Governor

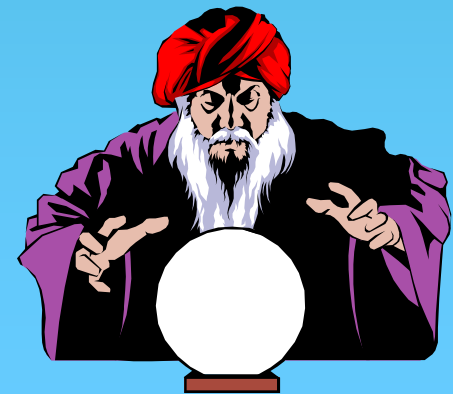
- \$87.7M to make whole school divisions
- \$5.9M for textbooks
- \$34.4M for elementary resource teachers
- \$11.1M for pre-K
- \$3M for pilot models for awarding performance pay in hard-to-staff schools

How did we get what we wanted?

- Stay close to our champions.
 - Who are our champions? Let's take a look.
- Court others to become champions.
 - How do we win over those who do not agree with our position?

How can you help?

- In what stage of public advocacy are you?
 - Buy in, self-interest, political sophistication, leading the way
- Whose job will it be to assure that you maintain and flourish in your position?



What you can do to help

- Longer-term advocacy
 - Document what you do and how it relates to student learning.
 - Engage parents.
 - Tell your story to administrators, teachers, and parents—again and again and again.
 - Get to know your legislators; tell your story. Must be done!!
 - Respond to email requests for testifying, writing letters/emails and so forth.



An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

- **Martin Luther King, Jr.**