

# Advocacy *and* Educational Technology



A Guide to Getting Your Voice Heard

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# Preface

ISTE members often approach me to say that they are interested in getting involved in advocacy but don't know how to get started. Many seem hesitant to become involved because they are unsure if policy makers are interested in what they have to say. It is important that you make your voice heard, and policy makers do listen to constituents. How will a policy maker know that classroom technology is important unless you tell them? In response to the growing importance and interest in advocacy, ISTE established the Voices Carry advocacy campaign to help ISTE members strengthen their voices to effect change at all levels of government. This booklet, *Advocacy and Educational Technology: A Guide to Getting Your Voice Heard*, is one component of the Voices Carry campaign.

Most of the references in this book have to do with policies and programs in the United States. However, there is much to be gleaned by readers in any country. We encourage you to apply the principles and examples given to the environments in your local, regional, and national government structures.

## How Much Time Do You Have?

*Advocacy and Educational Technology* is designed to share some of the most pressing policy issues for education technology advocates as well as to provide you with the tools and resources to get started. In fact, here are four ways to get started advocating today, based on how much time you have:

- **Two minutes?** Spread the word. Send a pre-composed letter or email through the Ed Tech Action Network (ETAN) at [www.edtechactionnetwork.org](http://www.edtechactionnetwork.org) and share this website with five friends.
- **Five minutes?** Develop an effective “elevator” speech. Imagine yourself in a situation where you unexpectedly come into contact with someone who could be instrumental in raising support for educational technology. You have less than a minute to make a positive impression on this person.

- **Fifteen minutes?** Educate yourself and join the conversation. Hear it from the source: Hilary Goldmann, ISTE's senior director of government affairs, shares the latest advocacy news from Washington, D.C., as it happens ([www.iste-community.org/profiles/blog/list?user=HilaryGoldmann](http://www.iste-community.org/profiles/blog/list?user=HilaryGoldmann)).
- **Sixty minutes or more?** Set up a meeting with a policy maker or the person's staff. Can't get to D.C.? That's okay. Policy makers have offices throughout their states, and members of Congress or their staff members will meet with you. This is a great way to share your expertise and become the go-to person for advice to share with fellow advocates.

Each of us has the responsibility to seize opportunities to influence federal, state, and local policies. We need to band together and make our voices heard!

The purpose of this guide is twofold: to help you better understand the ongoing issues we face and to provide the references and tools to help you become involved in making a difference.

## Chapter 1



# What Is Advocacy?

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

—Margaret Mead

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE®) is the premier membership association for educators and education leaders engaged in improving learning and teaching by advancing the effective use of technology in PK–12 and teacher education. ISTE represents more than 100,000 education leaders and emerging leaders throughout the world and informs its members regarding educational issues of national and global scope.

ISTE members include individuals, affiliate organizations, and corporations:

- 20,000+ individual members
- 80 affiliate organizations
- 89 individual member countries
- 6 affiliate regions worldwide
- 65 corporations worldwide

ISTE membership is a powerful and meaningful way for educators to connect with peers, to gather in a variety of forums to share the challenges and excitement of teaching, and to be part of a community that leads the transformation of education.

## Advocacy—A Top Priority for ISTE and the Author

In 2002, ISTE opened an office in Washington, D.C., to help advance one of its top priorities: advocacy of technology in education at the federal level in the United States. As ISTE's senior director of government affairs, I am responsible for raising ISTE's visibility and influence inside the beltway and for growing ISTE's grassroots efforts, spending a great deal of time directing policy meetings and working in concert with other organizations and business groups to develop and advance a united educational technology message.

With ISTE's support and in cooperation with other organizations, I have worked on updating provisions of the Enhancing Education Through Technology program (EETT), revising it as the Achievement Through Technology and Innovation Act (ATTAIN), which was introduced in the Senate by a bipartisan committee in April 2009, and, since that time, advocated for passage of ATTAIN, either as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization or as a stand-alone measure.

"Inside the beltway" refers to the U.S. political system, much of which resides within the Capital Beltway (U.S. Interstate 495).

EETT is also known as *E2T2*.

ESEA is spelled out: *E-S-E-A*.

In April 2011, the Enhancing Education Through Technology program was completely cut by Congress, a disappointing action because EETT was the only federal funding stream that was allocated exclusively to developing better educational technology. However, this was expected because it had been eliminated from President Obama's proposed budget. Instead of having EETT or a successor program as a separate, directed federal program, the administration proposes to infuse technology throughout the 11 major funding priorities that the Obama administration supports in a refashioned ESEA.

(For more details, see [www.iste-community.org/profiles/blogs/ed-tech-eliminated-in-final](http://www.iste-community.org/profiles/blogs/ed-tech-eliminated-in-final), my blog post from April 12, 2011: "Ed Tech Eliminated in Final Budget Bill for FY 11.")

## Defining Advocacy

In simplest terms, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2011) defines advocacy as "the act or process of advocating or supporting a cause or proposal." Yet, advocacy is even more than that. It's caring deeply enough about an issue to stand up and demand that your voice be heard by the people who have the power to make the changes.

## Why Is Advocacy Important?

Advocacy for congressional support of technology in education is absolutely vital to the future of our children. This is our central message. Federal policy makers in Washington D.C. are facing increased pressures to tighten budgets, and even when they hear from constituents, as we have seen in 2011, they are capable of cutting funds from key programs—including those that keep classrooms competitive through education technology. Without a vocal constituency advocating for funding—as well as restoration of much-needed funds—in their home districts, elected officials can all too easily ignore the needs of 21st-century learners.

Each member of Congress relies on staff members, who in turn handle a large portfolio of policy issues. For instance, the staff person who handles education (this would include PK–higher education) may also handle healthcare, agriculture, housing, and labor issues. So, when meeting with this staff person and sharing information about education technology, it is important to note that five minutes later there will be



someone else in the office meeting with this same staff person, and that someone will share vital information about a completely different policy area.

Even if I make a compelling presentation, how can we ensure that the message will resonate and land high on the list of priorities for this member of Congress? The best way to make sure my message is heard is by reminding this and every member of Congress that my voice represents those of numerous constituents.

Constituents' voices are those that really resound in the halls of Congress. Members of Congress must hear from the people who vote for them, or else they will not know that education technology issues (among other issues) are a priority for their district. The grassroots component of influencing funding decisions is critical. Policy makers have many competing demands weighing on them; therefore, it is the education technology community's responsibility to make sure they hear our message. This is the way an issue gets on the priority list—complementary and multiple messages resonating from the districts. Every victory is a celebration, but advocacy is ongoing.

## What Is Lobbying?

Lobbying is a form of advocacy with the goal of influencing decisions made by legislators and other officials in the government. ISTE is a 501(c)(3) organization. We are allowed to lobby, but we are restricted from political campaigning. Put another way, ISTE may take sides with respect to political issues, but not political candidates. Additionally, we have elected to follow the 501(h) lobbying expenditure test, which provides strict financial limits for our lobbying expenditures.

Lobbying can be either *direct* or *grassroots*. Direct lobbying involves contacting legislators or their staffs about specific legislation and providing a view on the legislation. Grassroots lobbying attempts to influence legislation through communications with the general public. The public is urged to contact their legislators in support of or in opposition to legislation. My representation of ISTE's membership includes both direct and grassroots work.

### **Direct Lobbying**

An example of direct lobbying is when I meet with policy makers and ask them to take a specific position with regard to a policy issue. Often I meet with Congressional staff and encourage their boss to sponsor or co-sponsor a particular piece of legislation, vote a particular way on a piece of legislation, or provide a certain amount of funding for a particular federal program.

### ***Grassroots Lobbying***

Grassroots lobbying occurs when I reach out to ISTE members and inform them about policy issues and encourage them to take action. ISTE does this in various ways, ranging from communicating via the Education Technology Action Network, sending email messages to various ISTE communication channels such as the ISTE affiliates and the SIGs (special interest groups), and ISTE advocacy professional development activities. ISTE's grassroots lobbying activities are focused on increasing the number of education technology advocates and supporting these individuals in their advocacy endeavors.

As part of our grassroots lobbying activities, ISTE is leveraging social media tools such as ISTE Connects, ISTE Ning, ISTE's Facebook page, and Twitter. We are investigating new ways to leverage social media for advocacy and have held a "Tweet for Ed Tech" day.

### **Successful Lobbying**

Through ISTE's Board of Directors and Public Policy and Advocacy Committee, we develop a U.S. Public Policy Principles and Federal and State Objectives document to guide our policy activities for the year. This document states: "ISTE's public policy principles and federal and state objectives are founded upon our members' uncompromising commitment to provide students the technology and information skills and tools necessary for success in the 21st century."

Coalitions—such as the Committee for Education Funding ([www.cef.org](http://www.cef.org)), America's largest education coalition that reflects a broad spectrum of the education community (PK–20); the Education and Library Networks Coalition ([www.edlinc.org](http://www.edlinc.org)), focusing on the E-Rate program; and the National Coalition for Technology in Education and Training ([www.nctet.org](http://www.nctet.org))—are indispensable for gaining allies and working in concert to achieve our policy goals and to bring ISTE's message to a broad range of education, corporate, and public service organizations.

The key to lobbying effectively is knowing how to integrate activities, depending on the issue at hand, to achieve success. I am able to tap the ISTE membership's expertise through formal and informal channels to garner advice, guidance, and timely feedback when developing legislative proposals and monitoring legislation that is moving in the halls of Congress. ISTE members have served as crucial resources in helping to guide our policy positions on No Child Left Behind (NCLB/ESEA), E-Rate, EETT, ATTAIN, and teacher preparation legislation.