



Practicing What We Teach!

A Guide to Effective Advocacy for the Social Studies

This document is intended to be a guide on how to be an effective advocate for the Social Studies, to increase attention and resources for Civics, Economics, Geography and History education. To compete for scarce time and resources, we, the Social Studies educators of our nation, must become better advocates for our disciplines, with education policymakers at the national and state level. Each Social Studies professional must take responsibility to be a vocal advocate, to ‘practice what we teach’ in civic engagement. ‘We the social studies’ must be our best and most frequent advocates. Here are some tips and techniques to help each NCSS member and each state Council become effective champions for the Social Studies:

NCSS Members:

- Sign up for advocacy alert list-serves from NCSS, the Council for Economic Education, the Network of Alliances for Geographic Education, the National Coalition for History and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. Each time they send an alert requesting action, please respond and take action.
- Try to individualize your messages to policymakers. Use your own words, share your own experiences, relate a request for action to your community or state. Congressional offices want to know what is going on in their district or state. Stories, statistics and factoids from home are more likely to get attention.
- When contacting Congressional offices, don’t rely solely on ‘Voter Voice’ type emails. Email and phone the Member’s Legislative Assistant for Education. Follow up as appropriate to ensure your message has gotten through. Be brief and respectful in your communications. Always remember that the Staff member you are communicating with will advise the Congressperson or Senator on what action to take on your request. Every Congressperson and Senator has a website that lists phone numbers for their Washington and District (or State) offices.
- Encourage your colleagues to become engaged! Let them know how to sign up for alerts. Share the alerts you receive with your colleagues, and encourage them to take action, too.
- Brainstorm with your colleagues on ways to engage policymakers in the Social Studies in your area. Policymakers or their senior staff can visit schools; Skype with classes; present Social Studies-related awards; meet with student government or newspaper staff. Be creative! If you can’t get the Member of Congress, ask for a representative from the closest District office.
- Ask your Council chairperson if your Council has created an advocacy team to convey the importance of the Social Studies at the local, state and federal level. Volunteer to be a part of the team.

NCSS Councils:

- Each and every state Council must develop an advocacy team dedicated to ensuring our voice is heard in every state capitol and in Washington. Each Council should task one individual to be the liaison with the NCSS Government Affairs team.
- Familiarize yourself with the current education reform issues in your state and how they relate to (or leave out) the Social Studies. Look for openings to inject content, increase resources or time allocations. Spot trouble with proposed reforms before those reforms become a problem. Work to have a voice in all reform discussions.
- Don't wait until we have a specific 'ask' to become known to education policymakers. Each year sit down with members of your state legislature's education committees to discuss Social Studies priorities in the coming session of your state legislature. Meet with the District Office staff of your members of Congress. Let them know of your concerns for the Social Studies, get to know them and they know you, so when you come to them for an 'ask' they know who you are and who you represent. Each Council should meet regularly with your State Board of Education and your Governor's Education Aide and your Chief State School Officer. The more they know you, the more receptive they will be when you come to them with an 'ask.'
- Each state Council should ensure that each Education Legislative Assistant for the Senators and Representatives from your state has a point of contact on the advocacy team who provides relevant, state-specific information and is known to them. This will make the advocacy team a go-to resource on the Social Studies, and ensure that the Congressional staffer is familiar with your group when you need to ask for help and support.
- Invite Congresspersons and Senators to your events, and be sure to include their District (or State) office staff. Ask programs in your state to invite members of Congress and their staff to their events. The more they know you and your issue, the more likely you will receive a sympathetic hearing when you need something from them.
- Always be non-partisan! Remember the Republican or Democrat you offend today, may become the Committee Chairperson deciding the fate of your discipline tomorrow.
- Numbers count! When a Congressperson or Senator receives a few dozen requests to take action, they are more likely to do so, then if they had received 2 or 3 requests.
- Collaborate! Don't fight amongst ourselves! One of the biggest challenges in effective Social Studies advocacy is for proponents of the disciplines (Civics, Economics, Geography and History) to squabble over scraps. That is tremendously counter-productive. Build a state advocacy team that represents each discipline and collaborate to achieve mutual goals. Each discipline should be mutually supportive of each other's policy goals whenever possible.
- Form alliances with other groups with an interest in the Social Studies and persuade them to join you in lobbying for our field. State Leagues of Woman Voters, Chambers of Commerce, the PTA, Teachers Associations, civic engagement groups are all interested in helping to create more knowledgeable and engaged citizens.
- Don't be shy! Let NCSS, the Council for Economic Education, the National Geographic Alliance, the National Coalition for History and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools know what you need from them to be effective advocates for the Social Studies!