



Arkansas Retired Teachers Association

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Public Education— 10 Ways to be an Effective Advocate



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INTRODUCTION

High-quality public education for all children sounds like a great idea. In reality, it has faced challenges since its inception and support for it varies greatly.

This booklet outlines 10 ways that those who believe in the power of public education can become effective advocates for public schools and public school employees.

Suggestions in this booklet are adapted from *How Can I Advocate for Public Education?*, published by the Indiana Retired Teachers Association.

Feel free to adapt these ideas to meet your interests and to share them with others.

Download a reproducible file of this booklet at
www.artanow.com/resources

10. SIMPLY VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

Whether you are a busy parent, a retired educator, or a community member at-large, you can support and advocate for public education by volunteering your time. Schools desperately need parent and community involvement. Tutoring and mentoring are just two of the ways to give back and help support high-quality education for all. Ask your child's classroom teacher or your local public school how you can volunteer.



CONCLUSION

This is by no means a complete list of ways to get involved, nor should you feel that you have to do everything on this list to be an effective advocate—simply advocating in the way that best meets your needs and interests will make a difference.

Finally, do not undermine public schools and educators by speaking poorly of schools, teachers or students in broad terms. The issues around public education are more complicated than that. They deserve careful scrutiny, thoughtful conversations and sincere interest in the best education for *all* children.

8. DONATE TO PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOM PROJECTS

Many school districts have programs to collect school supplies, shoes or winter coats, packaged foods and other basic needs for students. These programs are important but do not address classroom needs. Ultimately, we want our public schools to be adequately and equitably funded. As it stands now, many classrooms lack the added resources they need to provide children with high-quality education.

You can help by checking to see if your school district has an education foundation that assists educators with classroom needs. You can also find specific projects in need of funding using the website www.DonorsChoose.org.

9. SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS—CURRENT, FUTURE & RETIRED

Many states are facing a looming teacher shortage. And sadly, 33 percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first three years of employment. Stemming this attrition by recruiting and retaining quality educators is crucial for both the public school system and the public employee retirement system. One way to help current and future educators is through involvement with a retired educators organization.

ARTA members contribute to a grant fund for Arkansas public-school employees to further their education. Contributions to this fund in the form of memorials and donations from the public are also welcome. At the local level, these same members participate in programs that provide financial assistance to students seeking a career in education, conduct mock interviews with education graduates preparing for employment, offer mentoring and encouragement to new teachers, and more.

At the national level, NRTA welcomes mentors for young teachers through its Educator Support Network.

1. GET INVOLVED IN YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Getting involved in your local public school system is one of the best ways you can begin to advocate for high-quality public education for all.

Parents and grandparents might choose to attend PTO meetings, coffee hours with the principal, open houses and school events. Family and community members also serve on the school board or attend school board meetings and forums that are open to the public.

Most importantly, get to know others in your school district who are already involved to see how you can help support your local schools, then use your talents and time in a way that matches your personality.

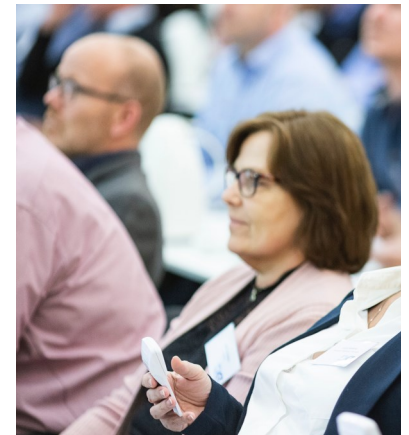
2. JOIN AN ADVOCACY GROUP

Arkansas Retired Teachers Association—Arkansas's only organization dedicated to the welfare of public education retirees encourages members to maintain an active interest in Arkansas's public schools.

National Retired Teachers Association—Members of AARP's Educator Community are dedicated to continuous educational opportunity, advocacy and service as a means of safeguarding the economic security, work opportunities and future well-being of all generations.

National Education Association—A professional employee organization committed to advancing the cause of public education, NEA's members work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

You can also find many state and local groups via social media or by asking your colleagues and others about groups they are part of.



3. USE TOOLS & APPS TO FOLLOW LEGISLATION

Stay informed on legislation that affects educators and public education. Mobile users might like apps such as **Countable** and **Congress**. Both allow you to find and contact lawmakers, follow legislation of interest, and receive notifications of upcoming activity or votes. You can also follow federal legislation via www.congress.gov and state legislation via www.arkleg.state.ar.us.

ARTA members can subscribe to a group messaging service to receive updates on topics and events that affect Arkansas's educators, especially health and retirement benefits. Learn more at www.artanow.com/membership.

Become a cyber-lobbyist. The NEA's Legislative Action Center provides a wealth of resources for those who want to advocate for more support of public education and educators.



4. HAVE CONVERSATIONS & EDUCATE THOSE AROUND YOU

If you're passionate about public education, the best thing you can do is to spread that passion to those around you. Engage in respectful conversations in person, at your house of worship, with friends and family, on social media, or on the phone with community leaders.

Encourage others to take an interest in the issues around public education. Share with them about the importance of public schools in safe, strong communities. Educate them on what is considered high-quality education and how it can result in positive outcomes for children when it is funded and supported properly.

5. LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN

Don't care to march or attend long meetings? Luckily, old-fashioned letter writing is still a powerful tool for making your voice heard. Consider writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper in support of public education or making the case for any of the important issues surrounding public education.

You can also write letters to leaders in your community, such as your mayor, faith-leaders, community organizers, school administrations and others, to let them know why you believe public education is important and how they can support it.

6. CONTACT YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Letters, emails and phone calls are effective ways to influence your elected representatives, and to let them know what their constituents want and expect. You can also visit your elected officials in person and in town hall meetings. Use your voice to make it known that public education is important to their constituents—you and those around you.



7. ADVOCATE FOR PROPER FUNDING

There are many complicated issues around how we fund public education. Educate yourself on issues such as voucher programs, sufficiency of funding, equity in funding, productive use of funds, sustainability of funding and accountability/transparency of expenditures. Again, the National Education Association (www.nea.org) has many great resources to help you understand the issues and tools to help you take action.