

ADVOCACY GUIDE: RESOURCE 13

Small Steps for Educators: Advocacy in the Classroom

Classrooms should be places where students feel comfortable enough to practice their emerging advocacy skills, which means cultivating classroom culture that welcomes perspective-taking and diverse viewpoints.

In English/Language Arts or History classes, it may make sense to have an entire unit on advocacy; in other classes, it is still possible to practice advocacy-related language and spontaneous speaking. These ideas are intended to illustrate a few starting points to imagine incorporating advocacy into daily instruction.

In Class...

- **Warm-ups.** As a discussion starter, pose one perspective on a current social justice issue and then ask the class, “Who is Missing?”. This gets students in the habit of looking for silenced perspectives.
- **Interview Assignment.** Have students interview someone in their life about their struggles and challenges. Instead of reporting out on their findings, have them instead create a set of 1-2 minute remarks advocating for addressing this person’s needs.
- **Show-and-Tell Routines.** As a quick weekly routine, have students bring social problems to share with the class and ask for volunteers to propose solutions.
- **Connection to themes in a novel study unit.** Ask students to select a character in a novel and answer the question, “How would you advocate for that character?” It is important for them to say their answers out loud to practice public speaking skills.
- **Self-contained unit in a public speaking or leadership class.** When combined with final public speaking assignments like community action projects, group advocacy presentations, and simulations, you can build students’ public speaking skills over time.

In School...

- **Peer mentor programs.** It is powerful for youth to practice mentoring younger students. These types of programs are great places to incorporate advocacy practice.
- **School podcasts.** If there is a school-wide podcast, students can submit personally significant issues and create episodes advocating for solutions to student struggles.

- **Integrate advocacy practice into existing student clubs.** Many clubs represent specific student interests, which make them great places to practice advocacy. Faculty sponsors can help incorporate practice sessions to improve speaking skills.
- **Increasing responsibilities for student representatives on school leadership committees.** Students can often be more involved in selecting topics for committee agendas, creating the actual agendas, and even facilitating meetings. Heighten student roles by making sure they have the chance to make consequential decisions, as opposed to only offering opinions when called on by adult leaders.

In High-Stakes Situations...

- **Practice for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.** For special education students and parents, it can be helpful to practice and rehearse how to self-advocate, including how to deal with challenging situations or a hostile or disinterested audience.
- **Parent advocacy workshops.** Students aren’t the only ones who can use practice with their advocacy skills. It is helpful for schools to offer workshops to help parents and families prepare for meetings, organize their thoughts, and feel confident and valued in decisions about their child’s education.
- **Student advocates.** Being an advocate can also mean offering support for people who need extra assistance, such as translation services, speech coaching and feedback, and thought partnership to refine ideas. When prepared, students can be paid leaders or volunteers who assist other students and parents to prepare for high-stakes situations.

