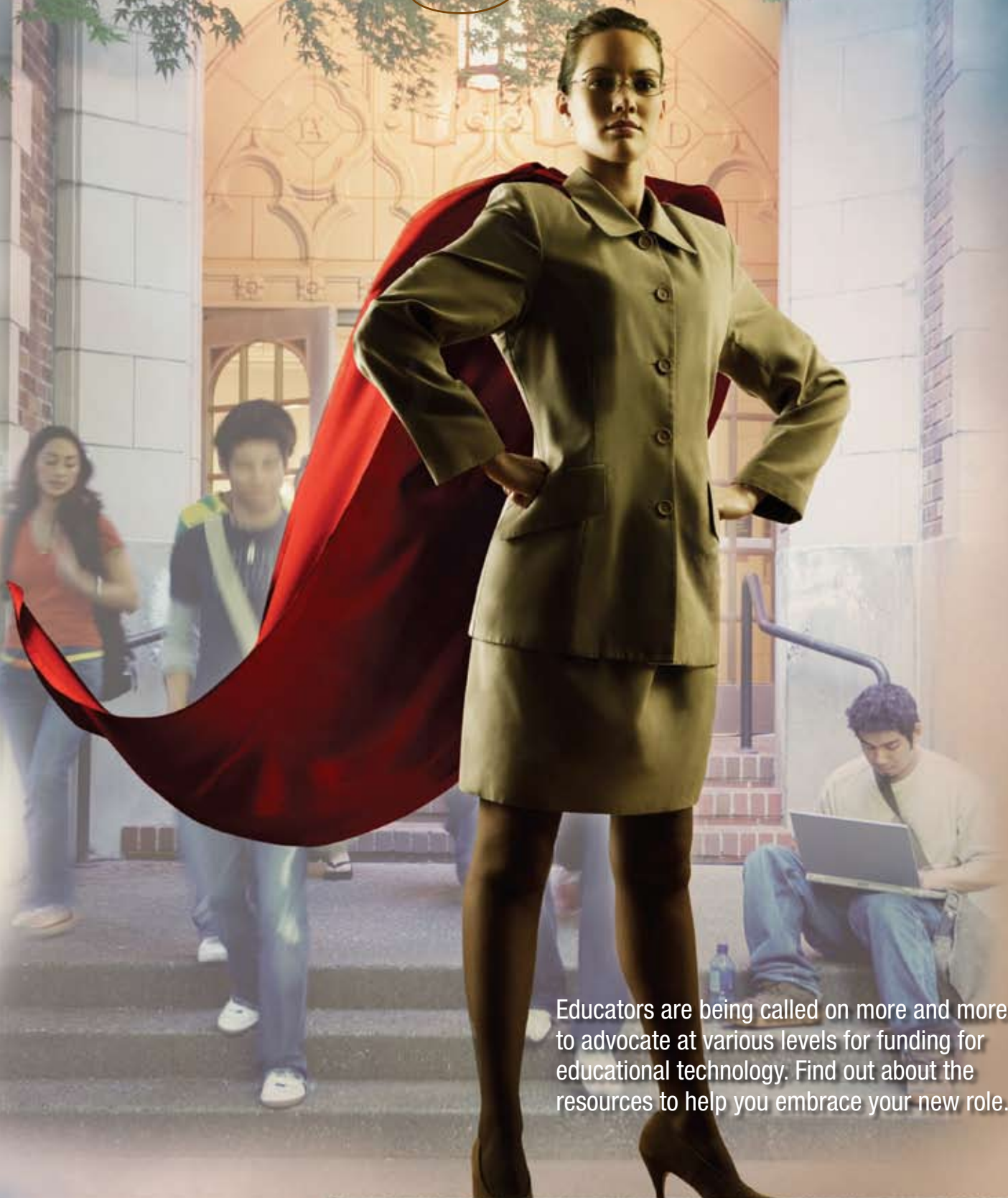# Embracing the Common Cause

Advocating for Ed Tech

Educators are being called on more and more to advocate at various levels for funding for educational technology. Find out about the resources to help you embrace your new role.

By Jennifer Roland

"Leave the politics to the politicians!"

This is a common response from educators confronted with the notion of advocating for educational technology funding. But, in a time when U.S. funding for Ed Tech is in danger of being cut from the budget, ISTE believes that all of its members, and in fact, all U.S. educators, must become advocates for our common cause. "Effective advocacy from people close to the classroom makes a huge difference," says ISTE president and New Mexico's Deputy Cabinet Secretary of Education Kurt Steinhaus. And, a driving goal for ISTE's Director of Government Affairs Hilary Goldmann is to help educators understand "how important it is for individuals to have their voices heard."

But how does the average tech coordinator, teacher, media specialist, or even administrator take the case for educational technology to a higher level? There are some easy steps you can take to advocate at any level and for any cause. ISTE's Advocacy Toolkit and the Ed Tech Action Network (ETAN), which Goldmann calls integral to ISTE's advocacy efforts, contain all you need to get yourself ready to be an effective Ed Tech advocate. ETAN makes it very easy, providing action alerts that let you know when and how to act on behalf of Ed Tech. (***Editor's Note:*** Find this and other URLs under Resources on p. 13.)

The most important part of your preparation will be your research. You should know your topic—in this case, the particular piece of Ed Tech funding you are supporting. Find out how specific technologies have improved learning, administration, or home–school communication in your educational setting. Pull together facts and figures to support your case. And find out who you will need to make your case to. If your district allows site-based decision making for technology, you should focus your efforts on your building administrators.

If you need to go to the state or national level, ISTE's Advocacy Toolkit recommends that you make sure you find the right people. Find out who represents your region, and find out who has power. Find legislators who are "on the right committee, in positions of leadership, have special knowledge and interest in technology. It is important to work with a player when you want something done," the toolkit document *Making the Case to Policy Makers* continues. The ETAN Web site lists the members of the key committees, including the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and the House Education and the Workforce Committee. Also, look at newcomers, the toolkit suggests. Did your state just elect a new U.S. senator? He or she might be just the contact you need to long-term success in advocating for funding.

There may also be legislative task forces (and personnel on those task forces) that you will need to be aware of. For example, the Oregon House of Representatives has a Stable Schools

Advocacy Day

ISTE and The Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) are working together to bring educators to Washington, D.C., to show the groundswell of support within the educational community for technology. Educators have received training in advocacy and have met with members of Congress and senators at three previous events, in March 2004, September 2004, and March 2005. The March 2005 Advocacy Day brought almost 150 educators from 37 states to Washington, D.C.

Advocacy Day not only will allow you to learn firsthand how to advocate to important and busy decision makers, it will also connect you to a community of like-minded educators in a way that no other event can. And, the experience could lead you to organize your own Advocacy Day in your community or at your state legislature.

The next Advocacy Day is March 8, 2006. Training begins the day before, with a Public Policy Boot Camp for first-time attendees. Participants can learn about current events in an Issues Briefing on March 8. There is no charge to register for Advocacy Day or for the training events, but preregistration is required. CoSN's K–12 Networking conference Web site includes instructions to register online, by mail, or by phone.

ISTE's Advocacy Efforts

ISTE supports its members' needs by serving as their advocate in Washington, D.C., and by pulling together coalitions to support important Ed Tech Issues.

ISTE partnered with CoSN to create ETAN to help connect educators with "a state-of-the-art grassroots website and online community," according to the Web site. The two main components of ETAN are the tools provided online and the network mailing list, which lets members know about legislation and action they can take to ensure that educational technology receives the necessary funding. And, Hilary Goldmann, ISTE's Director of Government Affairs, points to the success of recent action alerts. As of press time, more than 7,000 e-mails have been sent to U.S. legislators because of ETAN action alerts.

The Advocacy Toolkit was created by participants in ISTE's 2004 and 2005 Leadership Symposia. The starter kits and templates focus on making the case for Ed Tech not only to elected officials and school personnel, but also to corporations, school boards, community members, and education associations. The newest addition to the toolkit are stories of Ed Tech in action, organized in groupings of stories that show how technology transforms learning, motivates students, improves achievement, builds community, and improves access for underserved populations.

In addition to these two cornerstones of ISTE's advocacy efforts, ISTE also provides Washington Notes on its Web site monthly. Washington Notes summarizes key action in the U.S. legislature.

Finally, ISTE's staff and volunteers are advocating on members' behalf. ISTE's Washington, D.C., contingent includes Goldmann, Director of Strategic Initiatives Mila Fuller, and CEO Don Knezek. They are working together to help members learn how to advocate, act as members' proxies in Washington, and build coalitions among organizations (e.g., ETAN) and member groups (e.g., like-minded Affiliates). And ISTE's Public Policy and Advocacy Committee guides ISTE in its advocacy efforts.

ISTE CEO Donald G. Knezek, PhD, is recognized internationally for his leadership in collaboration, planning, and standards development related to technology in schools. In his 28 years as a professional educator and with degrees from Dartmouth College, the University of Hawaii, and the University of Texas at Austin, Knezek's experience includes K–12 classroom, district office, university, regional service center, state department, and national and international organization leadership for technology.

Mila M. Fuller, MA, is ISTE's director of strategic initiatives. Fuller is responsible for helping the CEO establish and maintain strategic alliances. She also assists with identifying and exploring partnerships with institutions, agencies and other organizations to further the ISTE mission and to address technology in teacher quality. Prior to joining ISTE, Fuller served as a district-level coordinator for technology leadership, program manager for the Maryland Technology Academy Satellite Programs of Baltimore City, board president of the Maryland Instructional Computer Coordinators Association (MICCA, an ISTE Affiliate), and a fourth/fifth grade teacher.

Hilary Goldmann, ISTE's director of government affairs, has 18 years of experience in the public policy and advocacy arena. Before joining ISTE in July 2005, she led the Higher Education Information Technology (HEIT) Alliance, a coalition of 10 U.S. higher education and library associations that was established to promote the higher education and library community's interests in federal information technology policy.

Task Force that meets as needed. An educator from Independence, Oregon, would definitely want to meet with Rep. Vicki Berger, because not only does she hold that seat in the Oregon House, she also chairs the Stable Schools Task Force, which focuses on finding stable funding sources for Oregon schools. You can go to your state legislature's Web page or the National Education Association's Legislative Action Center to get information on your state legislators.

Once you have found out who the important players are, you will need to research their positions. This should be relatively easy if you are focusing on building or district personnel. You can ask your colleagues or even the person to whom you will be making your case. Voting records of state legislators can be a bit more tricky, because you need to know the exact bills and their effects to search through many state legislature Web sites. Local newspapers can be a treasure trove of

information on what your legislators have done for education lately.

National representatives are much easier to track, because many sources of information exist. Goldmann suggests four Web sites in addition to the Advocacy Toolkit and ETAN:

- U.S. House of Representatives Web site
- U.S. Senate Web site
- Thomas, which includes the text of current legislation, listings of bills by sponsor, the complete text of the

Congressional Record, and resources describing how bills become law
- FirstGov, which links users to all aspects and agencies in the U.S. federal government

Both the House and Senate Web sites allow you to e-mail legislators directly.

Project Vote Smart is also a goldmine for those looking for information on how national officials have voted on particular issues. Of particular interest are the pages that track key votes by issue and biographies, detailed voting histories, and results from the National Political Awareness Test (NPAT) for current officials and candidates (during election season). The NPAT allows legislators to show which issues they support. For example, you can see whether your senators and representatives support such education-related issues as national standards and increasing funding for block grants and infrastructure (including technology).

Once you've done your research, you will need to begin building your case. The Advocacy Toolkit provides templates and starter kits to help you make your case to the appropriate audience. One of the more interesting tools is How to Create an Effective Elevator Speech. This helps you not only in being able to make an unexpected case in a very short time (at an impromptu gathering or, as the name suggests, in an elevator), but also helps you focus your thoughts for longer meetings. The toolkit suggests that you put yourself in the shoes of the person you are talking to and then follow this general outline:

- Introduce yourself and quickly describe your role and expertise in educational technology.
- State the case you wish to make, using powerful details that are important to the listener (e.g., higher test scores, scientifically based research, global economy).
- Back up your argument with data or research that supports your claims.
- Suggest how the listener can resolve the problem.
- Explain how you can make his or her job easier.

Close by suggesting a call to action, the toolkit suggests, for example, a phone call or follow-up meeting. Then exchange business cards. You can follow the same general outline at prearranged meetings with policy makers, just be prepared with more data than you need for your elevator speech.

Another great resource in building your case is the position papers available on the ETAN site. The papers can help you focus your presentation, and you can print them and share them with the policy maker you are meeting, if you feel it is appropriate. At press time, two papers were posted, one on appropriations and one on the E-rate.

When you feel your case is strong, make an appointment with the person you are trying to persuade. When meeting with elected officials, make sure to be on time, but be prepared to wait. Policy makers have many competing objectives they must attend to in a finite amount of time. It may be that you end up meeting with a key staff member rather than the policy maker. The ETAN site suggests that you prepare so that you can stay on message during your meeting and that you continue the relationship after your meeting. During a presentation at NECC 2005, Sheryl Abshire (Calcasieu, Louisiana, Public Schools), Lisa Woodward (Alabama Supercomputing Program), and Amy Perry DelCorvo (Wayne-Finger Lakes Board of Cooperative Educational Services in New York) suggested inviting the official to local school and community events. This type of public activity is helpful in keeping the legislator's profile high in the community and in ensuring that he or she has personal experiences with your school and your students. Abshire, Woodward, and Perry DelCorvo also offer tips to handle the policy maker's response to your presentation, whether it is a hit or not, in their presentation handout. These tips will ensure that your meeting is productive, even if the legislator is not won over immediately by your facts, figures, and anecdotes. In addition, Goldmann suggests that your presentation and choice of legislators to target should be bipartisan, because you want both sides of the aisle to support your cause.

With the current political climate in the United States, advocacy is becoming an important part of any educator's job. With the help of the resources described here, even the most timid educator can embrace this new role with confidence and success.

Resources

CoSN: http://www.cosn.org

CoSN's K–12 School Networking Conference: http://www.k12networking.org

ETAN: http://www.edtechactionnetwork.org

FirstGov: http://firstgov.gov

ISTE's Advocacy Toolkit: http://www.iste.org/advocacy/toolkit/

National Education Association's Legislative Action Center: http://capwiz.com/nea/home/

Project Vote Smart: http://www.vote-smart.org/

Thomas: http://thomas.loc.gov

U.S. House of Representatives Web site: http://house.gov

U.S. Senate Web site: http://senate.gov

Sheryl Abshire, Lisa Woodward, and Amy Perry DelCorvo's NECC presentation handout: http://center.uoregon.edu/ISTE/NECC2005/program/search_results_details.php?sessionid=11501237

Washington Notes: http://www.iste.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Advocacy/Policy/Washington_Notes/Washington_Notes.htm

Jennifer Roland is a senior editor for L&L. She holds bachelor's degrees in journalism and political science. She has been with ISTE since 1994, working on L&L and ISTE's research journals and Special Interest Group publications.