



Appendix B: Why Advocacy? The case for building teacher agency and advocacy

In the last few decades a lot has been written about the widening educational disparities achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and needed improvements in STEM education. A number of well-intentioned initiatives (No Child Left Behind, test-based reform, etc.) aimed at addressing these issues have not been successful in achieving their goals. These educational reforms and policies were designed and implemented with minimal input from classroom teachers and experienced educators, creating a series of unintended consequences that compromised the policies' efficacy. The National Network of State Teachers of the Year argues that "intended policy outcomes are more likely to be achieved and unintended consequences avoided when expert teachers are part of the policy development and implementation planning" (NNSTOY, 2015).

We believe that experienced classroom teacher voices must be part of the education reform discussion. Since a solid foundational understanding of physics is fundamental to all sciences and to most engineering fields, coupled with the fact that physics courses often end up acting as gatekeeper courses in many science and engineering higher education programs, empowering physics teachers to advocate for the needs of their students and colleagues is a necessary goal. Policies aimed at effective physics education for all American students should be our goal; however, that goal is only attainable if teachers feel empowered to contribute to that goal through advocacy.

The effective solution to empowering teachers through advocacy cannot be designed without addressing the fact that most classroom teachers do not feel comfortable engaging in policy and political advocacy. It is the belief of this group that while most teacher leaders are already actively engaged in advocacy at the school and local level (teachers routinely advocate for programmatic and scheduling changes that better serve their students, are often actively engaged in building and department level budget developments and allocations, present before school boards of education and local organizations, etc.), most teachers do not see themselves as experts in advocacy, nor do they feel comfortable advocating at the state and national levels. Therefore, a systematic program is needed aimed at empowering teachers and enhancing teacher voices in the field of advocacy. The intent of this program is not to train teachers to speak and advocate on behalf of AAPT, but to empower teachers to advocate on their own behalf, on behalf of the teaching profession, and the educational needs of their students. The program's aim should be to develop teacher-leaders who are not only able to engage with policymakers on the topics of education policy, but who also have a skill set to support, train, and empower the next generation of teacher advocates. The aim is to build professional advocacy capacity into the physics teacher leader professional toolkit. We strongly believe that enhancing and empowering teacher voices and teacher advocacy while keeping effective teachers in the classroom will lead to positive improvements in education and education policy which will ultimately improve educational outcomes for all U.S. students. It is therefore our professional responsibility to facilitate effective teacher agency and teacher advocacy. We hope that the program we proposed will address this need.