



# Embedding Advocacy Opportunities Into All That We Do

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***Advocacy must be a part of everyone's job description.***

**First, define what we want. Then, find the best means to help us get there.**

## **Examples of little “a” advocacy (the Easy Button):**

--Wear lanyards, pins, etc. that show you are passionate about language learning. If you travel on a cart, use it as a way to promote the language in your school. Decorate it for holidays (see Deutsch mobile on the “Holiday and Seasons” episode available at <http://www.learner.org/resources/series185.html>) BTW, the world language videos at learner.org are a resource you need to check out if you haven't yet.

--Think about ways to use your outgoing correspondence to promote languages. Does your e-mail signature mention the importance of learning another language? ACTFL has the Discover Languages logo that you can download at <http://www.discoverlanguages.org>. It can be used as part of your e-mail signature, used on your syllabus, website, and any other communication that you have with the public.



--Get a Discover Languages Twibbon to put on your Facebook profile photo to visibly show your multitude of friends how you feel about languages:  
<http://twibbon.com/join/actfl--discover-languages>

--Share what you know with others. Retweet and repost articles that talk up language learning; send info. via e-mails and texts. You can do it the old fashioned way by picking up the phone or even talking face to face. You are a respected teacher...use your influence to speak up for languages.

--Be sure your school's website shows your program positively. Here's a link to my school and a video our department made to promote languages <http://www.centralbulldogs.org/worldlanguages.html> We made the video using Animoto (<http://www.animoto.com>) which very easily turned our simple photos into an attention catching video we originally debuted during an informational meeting about scheduling.

--A classroom newsletter is a good way to promote the language and language-related clubs and activities to your students and parents. I place a copy on each desk the very first day. Many students feel very unsure in a new setting and appreciate having something to read in those first few awkward moments before class begins. See an example at <http://lisalilley.wikispaces.com/> (For New and Not So New Teachers page-- Scroll down to the "la mochila newsletter" link.)

--Designate a bulletin board or other space as the "Wall of Honor". Put examples of your students' best work on display then watch them clamor to outdo one another the next time. The work is also evidence to others of your students' proficiency.

--Look for other spaces in your school to make your program more visible through displays of student work. Bulletin boards, display cases, doors, over water fountains, etc. help get the message out about all of the good things going on in the language classrooms and encourage more students to sign up to be part of the excitement.

--Think of ways to promote continued study at Open House/Back to School Night. You have a special opportunity to influence parents and other community members. The Foreign Language Association of Georgia has a brochure on their website that you could perhaps adapt to your situation: <http://www.flageorgia.org/advocacy/ForeignLanguageBrochure.pdf> The ACTFL store also has a brochure sale targeted for parents entitled "Go to the Head of the Class!" <http://actfl.org> (see "publications")

--Express a positive attitude about language teaching to your students. Convey your belief that language teaching is a profession that attracts the very best and brightest. See Harry Wong's discussion on teacher leaders vs. workers in *The First Days of School* via <http://www.effectiveteaching.com/> The ACTFL store has brochures for purchase entitled "Success in the Classroom...Success in Your Career" to encourage students to think about language teaching as a rewarding career field.

### **Students as Advocates:**

--A U.S. citizenry that values language learning isn't a dream...they sit in front of us each day. We gain their support by making language study an *experience* they can't get elsewhere. Students should not be asked to advocate for a particular politician or piece of legislation but they can speak to the overall benefits of learning another language.

--Students can enter a number of contests that promote awareness of second language study. Information about the AATSP poster contest can be found at its website. Visit the ACTFL website to learn about their student created video contest. Most state language organizations as well as universities sponsor similar contests.

--Think about using the good buzz generated through student travel. At the completion of a trip, ask your fellow travelers to complete a survey about what they got out of the experience. Publicize the positive quotes. See more ideas from the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers at <http://www.nysaflt.org/advocacy/state.html> Scroll down to "Advocate via student travel"

--Strive to match students' expectations with your own. The article "High School Students' Decision to Study Spanish" by Pratt, Agnello, and Santos appeared in the December 2009 *Hispania* published by AATSP and gives good insights about the factors that drive our students to continue their language study.

--The authors' research suggests that among the reasons students continue with language study is because of the possibility of career benefits. This led me to develop a unit for use later in Spanish I or early in my Spanish 2 class to allow students to explore careers that use Spanish. You can see the unit design and follow my progress at <http://www.lisalilley.wikispaces.com> then click on "Project Based Learning".

### **Ideas for Big "A" advocacy:**

--Cultivate relationships with decision makers before you ever need their help. Consider serving on committees that can build your credibility with your administration and other teachers. Invite counselors to a breakfast meeting and give them info. about the gains made through language learning as you ply them with doughnuts. By reaching out to others, they will be more likely to help you when you need it.

--Communicate with decision makers by sending a Discover Languages E-Card <http://www.discoverlanguagesecards.org/> or simply a handwritten note to thank them for their support of languages, for making a visit to your classroom, etc.

--Invite administration and other decision makers to visit your classroom. Help them lose the perception that languages are still being taught the way they were perhaps when they were in school. Ask them to time as students talk for two minutes in the language about a picture. Invite them to witness performance assessments where the language is used for a real life task. Follow up with an e-card or handwritten note after their visit.

--Be ready with your two-minute "elevator speech" to quickly and effectively get the point across about the importance of language learning. Have "talking points" ready about the cognitive benefits of language learning, career opportunities available, and the social development that comes about from learning about cultures different than our own. Be ready to answer as to why students should learn another language when the rest of the world already speaks English. See [actfl.org](http://actfl.org) and my wikispace for links to lots of material to help you forge your answer and your own set of talking points.

--Provide "can do" statements about what your students can do in the language. Learn more about this approach through Linguafolio and view a self-assessment grid. <http://www.ncssfl.org/links/index.php?linguafolio>

--Have your facts straight but keep in mind that anecdotes sell. Be prepared to tell about successes that your students have had due to their language study.

--Be sure to vote in local, state, and national elections. Be knowledgeable about candidates and issues affecting education. Help communicate this to others through social networks, working on and contributing to campaigns. Get signed up to receive updates from your association regarding pending legislation with the potential to affect language learning. Visit your state capital through your association's legislative day.

--Make frequent contact with your elected officials. You can find addresses and online forms to contact them through <http://www.c-span.org/CongressDirectory> Usually a personalized written letter is best followed up by an e-mail. Remember that you don't have to agree with a legislator's politics in order to ask for their support!

--Try it out by asking for support from your members of Congress for the Foreign Language Education Partnership Program Act sponsored by U.S. Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ). It would provide significant financial support for classroom programs that provide carefully sequenced foreign language classes from kindergarten through high school. See more information regarding this and other legislative issues at <http://www.languagepolicy.org/> as well as on AATSP's Advocacy page.

--Educate yourself on the issues. Use the previously mentioned addresses as well as getting signed up for your association's briefings. There are also good free, weekly briefings available through ACTFL's Smartbrief (<http://www.smartbrief.com/actfl>), Accomplished Teacher by Smartbrief offered to all through National Board at <http://www.smartbrief.com/nbpts/> *The Language Educator* is an excellent magazine available with your paid ACTFL membership (see <http://www.actfl.org> then click on publications and *The Language Educator* for sample articles.)

--Undoubtedly these briefings will lead you to many excellent blogs on education. A few good ones to follow are offered through Education Week at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/blogs/index.html> Some particularly thought provoking ones are "[Leading From the Classroom](#)" and "[Living in Dialogue](#)".

**REMEMBER: Do what you can, when you can. Just be sure to do something to make your voice heard by speaking up for the power of language learning.**

*"When a school board has just helped you celebrate Discover Languages month, has had a chance to see the students using their language beyond the classroom, and has seen the parent support for the program, they are much less likely to put it on the list for budget cuts.*

*It may sound simple, but it's true!"*

Marty Abbott, CLEAR News, Spring 2009

<http://clear.msu.edu/clear/newsletter/files/spring2009.pdf>