

REPAIRING AFTER ONE STORM, PREPARING FOR THE NEXT: AATF ADVOCACY

The words “repairing” and “preparing” are not that far apart when you just say them. However, doing one is a lot more desirable than doing the other, and solid preparation can certainly shorten repair after a storm. So it should be with AATF advocacy. While we do answer distress calls, we are also creating the resource base to deal with trouble before it happens. Whole chapters can be of help in this preparation by maintaining a digital membership list in order of location, so that the nearest potential advocate for French can most easily be identified. Members can volunteer to support nearby French programs in trouble, whether the teacher is a member or not, and they can profile their own institutions and districts, in anticipation of any difficulties that could arise on home turf. They also need to be vigilant about developing situations in districts around them. Most of all, they need to speak up when they know something is wrong. We cannot fix a problem which is invisible to us.

There are certainly parallels between our advocacy efforts and surviving a storm. Both can involve arguments to politicians for the allocation of funds, and both can require volunteers with a variety of skills. In both, the timing of relief is crucial. But how can advocacy be effective in a category five budget crunch and a political meltdown? You have your best chance if the following elements are in place:

- a general respect for the usefulness of foreign languages;
- solid French programs, with enthusiastic, caring and well-prepared teachers, who
- resolutely promote French on a regular basis;
- a chapter advocacy coordinator with active horizontal and vertical connections to members, other French teachers, school officials, parent groups, school-board members, members of the business community with international interests, etc.;
- permanent and universally-available state-specific information resources making possible a powerful argument for French locally;
- a rapid mobilization plan based on real local knowledge;
- solid national resources unencumbered by bureaucracy, as you will find on our national advocacy Web site, for which I am personally responsible: Ideas for French Language & Culture Advocacy in the U.S. [www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advofr.shtml].

Here again is what an AATF chapter advocacy coordinator or liaison does. It is worth repeating the expectations outlined

in the September 2004 *AATF National Bulletin* (page 3) and on our Web site [www.frenchteachers.org], because so many still ask what is involved in this work:

1. Work with other chapter members or with other chapters (in multi-chapter states) to make available state-specific advocacy materials on a Web page.
2. Organize information pertinent to the status of French in their chapters. This might include some of the answers to queries in the district and state profile lists Ideas for French Language & Culture Advocacy in the U.S. [www.utm.edu/staff/globeg/advofr.shtml].
3. Maintain a name and address list of influential people in the chapter (state supervisors, state and national representatives and senators, allies in business, state foreign language association contacts, etc.).
4. Identify members and interested allies who are willing to travel and speak, those who are willing to phone, and those willing to write letters.
5. Create, or be ready to create, correspondence templates for letter writing campaigns.
6. Put the call out that you are interested in any sign that a French program will be cut, scaled back, replaced by something else, or that someone is struggling to introduce a French program in a district where there is none.
7. If possible, map out where chapter members are geographically, so you can call on those near trouble spots.
8. Share ideas, success and failure stories with other chapters.

We now have appointed chapter advocacy liaisons in the following states: Arizona, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington DC, Wisconsin, and a designated webmaster in California. In the case of multi-chapter states, only New York has more than one chapter on board. In some cases chapter presidents are working as temporary advocacy liaisons while waiting for permanent volunteers to coordinate their efforts. In several chapters, I have seen calls for such volunteers on chapter Web sites, and I expect we will see more state-specific Web sites soon.

One more note about storms. The area of the U.S. most affected by Hurricane Katrina had a population of nearly 2.5 mil-

lion people. In many cases, education is even now severely disrupted, because children have had to seek it in schools outside of their former communities. This also means that a lot of good French programs are no longer in existence. As these communities are rebuilt along with educational facilities, we will need to be ready for a kind of advocacy job which we never experienced or even anticipated. I believe the seed of our future success in this unknown territory lies somewhere in the kind of preparedness I have suggested. A number of French-speaking countries have volunteered assistance for Katrina's unfortunate victims. Let us respond with a determination that our children will be able to thank them in their own language.

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