

Parent Action Conference 2015

Parent Organizing

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Advocacy

- “The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.”
- What does it mean to you?
- Where does it begin in your child's education for you?
- Having a personal connection with the decision maker(s) may be the easiest and probably most effective way to advocate.
- Otherwise, you must organize people to get behind your cause.

Organize around your issue

- Network with your PTA, your School leadership team, Community Education Council, Community Board, or teachers at your school.
- Have a meeting at your house, school, library, local café or other meeting place to discuss your concerns.
- Develop a message: 3-5 sentences that communicate your position and your values.
- Decide on your goals or “asks”: a concise list of the outcomes that you want; hopefully, they will be specific with a rationale to support them.

Organize Part II

- Ask parents (and teachers) to sign letters or petitions in front of school.
- Also use online petition sites such as www.ipetitions.com or www.signon.org
- Sign-on can also send emails to officials.
- Petitions, either paper or online, are also great for collecting parent contact info and developing an email list for updates and action alerts.

Hold an event

- Have a rally, protest or press conference in front of your school or City Hall.
- Or hold a forum or town hall meeting, at your school, church or elsewhere.
- Be sure to invite elected and education officials, parents and reporters at least a week ahead.
- Email a brief press advisory by 2 PM the day before to info@ap.org and reporters, with the date of the event in the subject line, telling where, when and what.
- Be sure to provide a contact person w/ your email and phone for more info.

At the event

- Take photos and videotape event and post on YouTube and Flickr or other online site.
- Distribute a press release after the event, one or two page document, briefly discussing the issue, with quotes and soundbites from the participants.
- Send it out shortly after the event has taken place to reporters, parents, officials, and others who could not attend.

Piggyback on the news

- Jumping on a news story with your viewpoint is the best way to get your issue out there, but you have to be fast!
- How to stay current? In NYC, subscribe to NYC education list and to DOE press releases and join Twitter.
- Also check out Chalkbeat or Google News at least once per day
- When you see news breaking that relates to your issue, email or call reporters immediately.

Dealing with reporters

- Have a good short quote in advance. Reporters are always looking for good quotes from parents!
- Develop an email list of reporters. Use it sparingly or they will start treating your messages as spam.
- Write letters to the editor; do not forget the community papers. For the tabloids, keep them as short as possible! Or ask if they want an oped.

More strategies

- Send letters and/or petitions with a cover letter to elected officials and key decision-makers. (Always keep a copy of your letter and the original petitions!)
- Do not forget to copy and/or contact your state legislators and city council members.
- Schedule meetings with key elected officials who represent you, including other parents in their districts.

Meetings with Elected Officials

- Prepare succinct “talking points” to make sure of a coordinated message, and have a pre-meeting with other parents to coordinate roles.
- Demand a written response and bug them until you get one.
- Do not forget to copy and/or contact other electeds.
- Always send a follow-up thank you letter after meeting with them; reiterating your points and your asks.
- Follow up with emails to parents and reporters with regular updates about your issue.

Collaborate

- Work with other groups, statewide or national, that support your issues.
- State groups: AQE (focuses on state funding)
- National groups: Network for Public Education; Parents Across America
- Parents are the “sleeping giant” in the fight to preserve our public schools, time to wake up!

Use social media

- Form a Facebook group or “page”
- Sign up for Twitter at twitter.com; you will get followers as soon as you follow others!
- Develop your own “hashtag” and post comments to officials and reporters
- Create your own website and/or blog. It’s free and only takes a few minutes!
- Free blog sites: www.blogger.com, www.blogspot.com/; <http://wordpress.com/>

: #protect our schools rallies
in Hundreds of schools this spring
generated lots of news stories



Why was it successful?

- Great photo op & visual image aligned with message
- Allowed parents & teachers to express their views in their communities & at their schools
- Was something new!
- Subsequent rally with thousands of people got little media coverage.

Lessons learned!

- ▶ Don't give up! It can take months or years to accomplish your goals.
- ▶ Be persistent, vocal and make sure you have evidence on your side.
- ▶ Try something new!

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