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Parent Organizing 101

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WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

“The act of speaking on the behalf of or in support of another person, place, or thing”

- What does it mean to you?
- Where does it begin in your child's education for you?

How to Get Parents Involved

Parents are more likely to become involved when they:

- Understand there is an issue that affects their children at the school or district level
- Feel capable of making a contribution
- Find out there are others who feel the same way



Organize Around Your Issue

- Network with your PTA, your School leadership team, local elected officials 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.



How do you make your ask?

- Ask parents (and teachers) to sign letters or petitions in front of school.
- Use online petition sites such as www.change.org or petitions.moveon.org
- 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.



Before the event

- Email a brief press advisory by 2 PM the day before to reporters & info@ap.org
- Include the date of the event in the subject line, and tell 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 Facebook, Instagram, 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 the release out shortly after the event has taken place to reporters, parents, officials, and others who could not attend.
- Some media outlets may quote from the press release even if they did 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.
- *nyceducationnews-subscribe@yahoogroups.com*
- 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 soundbite – a 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, and bring other parents who live in their districts.
- Call their offices and ask other parents to call too!



Meeting with elected officials or DOE

- 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 with others....

- Work with other groups, statewide or national, that support your issues.
- **Attend Community Education Council meetings**
- **Attend your local community board and reach out to education committee**
- State groups: Class Size Matters, AQE (focuses on state funding), NYC Kids PAC
- National groups: Network for Public Education; Parents Across America, Parent Coalition for Student Privacy



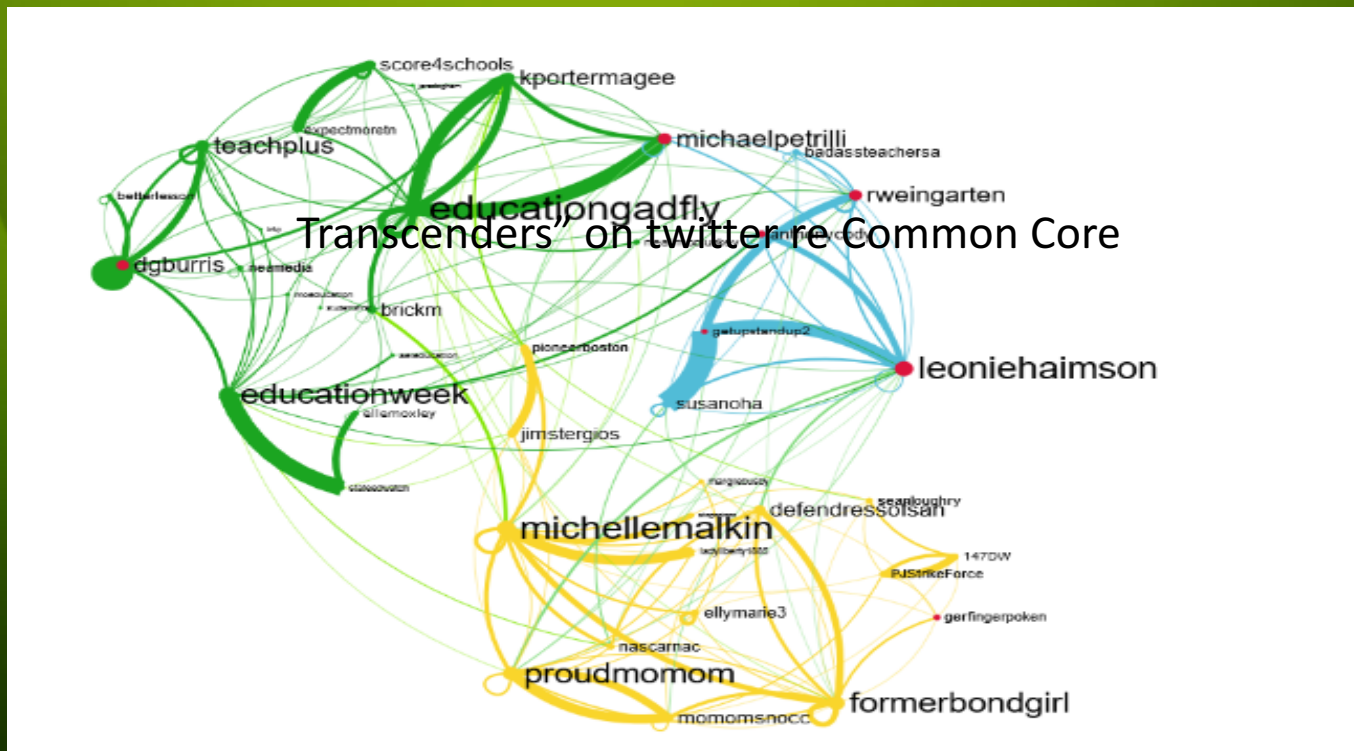
Use social media

- 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/>

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Twitter can be very effective in getting your message out to decisionmakers and potential allies



“Transcenders” on twitter re #CommonCore from <http://www.hashtagcommoncore.com>



In 2012 Gates Foundation got into the business of data collection and sharing

- They launched a project called the Shared Learning Collaborative with more than \$100 million
- Designed to collect personal information of public school students – to format data & share with for-profit data-mining software companies for the purpose of outsourcing evaluation, instruction and assessment
- Detailed personal data to include student names, addresses, grades, test scores, detailed disciplinary and disability information and more.
- in March 2013 the SLC spun off as a separate corporation inBloom Inc. – with 9 states and districts including NYC



In little over 13 months, inBloom collapsed

- How did this happen? Leonie started blogging about it as did Diane Ravitch
- She finally got one national reporter to write about it
- Parents in the 9 states and districts partnering with inBloom protested to their school boards, legislatures and State Commissioners and one by one cancelled their contracts
- NYS last to pull out as legislature passed a law against in March 2014
- In April 2014, and shortly after, inBloom closed its doors.

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Parent-led #protect our schools rallies in NYC schools in 2015 generated lots of news stories



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More recent successful Parent Led Campaign

- ❖ Make Space for Quality Schools in Sunset Park





What contributed to Success of these Campaigns?

- Great logo and visual image aligned with message
- Allowed parents and teachers to share and express views
- Was something new!
- Collaboration! Collaboration! Collaboration!



Lessons Learned

- ✓ Don't give up!
- ✓ Be persistent and vocal
- ✓ Have evidence on your side
- ✓ Try something new

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**Families and
Communities Make
a Difference!**