



PARENT ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK



NEW YORK CITY
CHARTER SCHOOL
CENTER

It's about great public schools.

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Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

The New York City Charter School Center was founded to support the development of a high quality charter school sector in New York City. Our goal is to ensure that public policies and politics engender the continued growth, autonomy and quality of charter schools.

The Parent Engagement Handbook educates parents, as well as school staff, about the advocacy process and offers numerous approaches to engagement with elected officials, government agencies and the community in support of your school. Study after study has shown that people are more apt to get behind schools they are familiar with – we encourage you to venture out of the school building and start connecting!

The Policy & Advocacy team is here to help you with this work. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or to assist with introductions as you get your engagement activities underway.



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What is a charter school?

Charter schools are free public schools open to all students. Sometimes charter schools are perceived as private schools because they are not run by the Department of Education. Instead, they are managed by a Board of Trustees. Charter schools are therefore exempt from many public school regulations for curriculum development, staffing and budgeting. Charter schools commit to meeting specific academic goals set by New York State, then make their own decisions about how to achieve them.

What makes charter schools different from traditional district schools?

Because they are independent from the district system, charter schools have greater flexibility in the way they operate. Charter schools are free to develop their own academic program, choose staff, set educational goals, offer a longer school day and school year, and establish their own standards for student behavior. Charter schools are required to raise student achievement. If they do not meet their performance goals they can be closed.

Who holds charter schools accountable for student performance?

Charters are issued by one of two “Authorizers” in New York: the State Education Department (SED) or the State University of New York (SUNY). Upon being authorized, a charter school is granted a five-year charter. This means that if the school fails to meet the academic goals set by its charter within its first five years, its charter can be revoked or not renewed and the school closed down.

Who can attend charter schools?

Charter schools are free and open to all students. If more students apply to a school than seats are available, students are enrolled based upon a random lottery system. Due to high interest, almost all charter schools (over 95%) have to hold lotteries in a given year.

How does the lottery system work?

When more students apply for a charter school than seats are available, State law requires that a random lottery be held by which to admit students. Within this lottery, certain populations do get preference. Preferences are required for siblings of enrolled students and students who reside in the local Community School District. Charter schools may decide individually to also give preference to English Language Learners, students from low-income families, students with low test scores, or other students at risk of academic failure. Using lottery preferences such as these enable charter schools to best serve the specific populations they were created to support. All lottery preferences other than those required by law must be approved by the charter school’s authorizer.

Where are charter schools located?

Charter schools are located in every borough of the city, serving students from all areas and neighborhoods. To locate and learn more about charter schools in New York City, visit: www.nycCharterSchools.org.

Parent Involvement is Important

Parents play a vital role in a child's life and education. It is important for parents to engage their child and build strong partnerships with his/her educators and schools. Here are six ways for parents to be involved:

Communicate with teachers: Communication between schools and parents is a two way street. Schools should communicate with parents about programs and student progress, and parents should reach out to school staff to discuss their child's work and progress. The key is not to communicate only during parent teacher conferences or when there is a problem, but to establish a relationship with your child's teacher by having a consistent and open dialogue.

Volunteer at your child's school: Reach out to your child's teacher, the school's administrative staff or parent association to learn about the various volunteer opportunities. Volunteering, which often includes helping out during classtime or supporting school events, will give you insights into how and why your child's school does things a certain way.

Be a part of the decision making process: A well rounded school will create ways for parents to weigh in on key decisions concerning the school. This may come in the form of governance like parent associations, selection committees, school councils, etc. When this opportunity is presented – get involved! Your school will thrive with your input and support.

Collaborate with the community: Parents can assist schools in coordinating resources and services for their families. Community groups, local businesses, cultural and civic organizations and even colleges and universities all have the potential to be a school partner. The next section will give specifics about how to engage your community.

Establish a learning environment at home: Learning doesn't end when students leave school – parents can support their child's education at home by learning about their curriculum and assisting with homework, reading together and much more. Talk with your child's teacher about what you can do to help your child.

Resource your parenting: Schools often provide supports and resources that assist families with parenting techniques, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to enhance learning at each grade level. There are also helpful workshops and videos on parent education, such as Great Schools' College Bound program (www.collegebound.com).

Section 2:

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

When a relationship between a school and its community is strong, everyone benefits. A successful school improves the quality of the neighborhood, while community support can help ensure the longevity and strength of a school. This is one of the reasons why charter school parents should strive to integrate their school into the community and work with local entities to build lasting relationships.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement refers to the process by which local organizations and individuals build ongoing, permanent relationships for the purpose of applying a collective vision for the benefit of a community.

Community engagement is important because people are more likely to support institutions that they see as part of their community; they are less likely to stand behind those they do not know or understand.

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS (CBOs)

A CBO is a non-profit organization that operates and/or provides services within a community.

Examples of CBOs that may be in your community are:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Tenant Associations
- The YMCA or YWCA
- Food Banks
- Block Associations
- Health Clinics
- Churches
- Faith-Based Groups
- Libraries
- Community Centers

Who are a charter school's community partners?

Generally speaking, community partners can include:

- Neighborhood businesses
- Community-based organizations (CBOs)
- Community boards
- Education committees & councils
- Local elected officials

APPROACHES TO ENGAGEMENT

Local Businesses

When you support local businesses, you are gaining a community partner while helping their business to thrive.

- Catering an event at the school? Use a local restaurant.
- Having a bake sale? Request a small donation of treats.
- Are you on a committee charged with beautifying your school? Buy supplies from local nurseries and hardware stores.
- Having a raffle at your school carnival? Ask for donations from local vendors.

Make sure to let the business know that you will advertise where the goods came from, helping promote their business while presenting them as a charter school supporter.

CBOs

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) provide vital services to a community for those in need. As a school, you share common interests with CBOs in strengthening your community.

- Invite a CBO to set up a table at your next open house.
- Organize students to volunteer. For example, help the local library by holding a book-drive.
- Partner on fundraising activities. For example, hold a bake sale to raise money for a local charity.

Community Boards

Every neighborhood in NYC is represented by a Community Board. These Boards serve as a link between your community and the government, looking out for what's best for your neighborhood and advocating for your community's needs. It is an important body of community leaders with whom to build a relationship. Every Community Board has an education committee; the Chair of this committee will serve as your first point of contact.

WAYS TO ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY BOARD

- **Identify which Community Board represents your district.** See <http://www.nyc.gov/html/cau/html/cb/cb.shtml> to identify your Community Board and when its meetings are held.
- **Attend a meeting.** Community Board meetings are held once a month and are open to the public. Each meeting sets aside a time for community residents to share their work, voice their concerns, etc. Community Boards also hold public hearings about major issues affecting the community. Attending monthly meetings and public hearings is an easy way to make sure you are seen and heard so that you can begin to build a relationship.
- **Get to know your Community Board members.** Remember that Community Board members are members of your community just like yourself. Some ways to engage them include:
 - Inviting members of your Community Board to visit your school.
 - Offering to give a presentation in front of the Board or Committee about charters and your school's work.
 - Getting your school on your Community Board's mailing list.
 - Remembering to connect with your Board and its members year round in order to build lasting relationships.
- **Join your Community Board.** As a parent, you can sit on your Community Board. If you are interested, contact us, or you can learn more by visiting: www.nyc.gov.

Community Education Councils (CEC)

CECs are the institutional community engagement component of the NYC Department of Education's (NYCDOE) public school system. They have an advisory role within the NYCDOE and serve as a place for local community voices to be heard.

There are 32 CECs in NYC, each with 11 voting members:

- Nine elected parents of current Pre-K – 8th grade students in public non-charter schools within the Community School District
 - At least one must be the parent of a student classified as an English Language Learner within the past two years.
 - At least one must be the parent of a student with an IEP
- Two members appointed by the Borough President, who either live or own a business in the district
- One non-voting high school student

CECs and charter schools are often only in communication when a problem arises, such as siting hearings. However, establishing a strong relationship with a CEC prior to conflict can often make these problems avoidable. Therefore, it is important to keep engaged with your CEC year round. While engaging with other community partners, inform your CEC as it may be able to help you, and you will be able to show how your school is actively participating in the community.

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

1. Many schools have someone on staff who serves as the primary liaison to parents. Reach out and let them know you are interested in getting involved.
2. Find out if your school already has a Parent Association, School Leadership Team, or a similar parent organization, and join the group.
3. Contact the Center's Policy & Advocacy team for opportunities, and keep an eye out for Center communication.

Other Schools in Your Community

A majority of New York City's school buildings house multiple schools in one facility. These "co-locations" can sometimes be challenging. Schools - whether they be charter or district - must learn how to communicate and work together to ensure positive relationships. Parents from each school in a building can help this process by getting to know each other and working together to support all their students.

- **Building Councils:** All school buildings with co-located schools in them have Building Councils. A Building Council is comprised of the principals from each school who serve as equal partners in making administrative decisions regarding shared space usage and schedules. Building Councils exist to ensure strong communication and relationships between schools sharing building space.
- **Shared Space Committees:** A Shared Space Committee exists for every school building that has a charter school. It is comprised of parents, teachers, and principals from every school (district and charter) that is co-located in that building. Four times a year, the Building Council meets with the Shared Space Committee to review their space usage plans for the campus and to explain their rationale for decisions made. It is expected that the Shared Space Committee will pass this information on to their fellow parents and staff to ensure transparency in the decision-making process.

Charter school teachers and parents are recommended for the Shared Space Committee by their school leaders. Let your school leaders know if you are interested in volunteering your time to serve on this Committee.

Additionally, minutes from these meetings are submitted to the Department of Education and are available online at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/community/campusgov/default>. Even if you do not wish to serve on the committee, keep yourself informed on what is happening at their meetings.

5 TIPS FOR ENGAGING COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- **Identify your group's strengths.** Be sure to identify the unique skills of each individual in your parent group and utilize their strengths to achieve your engagement strategy. For instance, if one parent is a strong writer, have him or her be responsible for letter writing. If another parent attends church with a local business owner, see if they can work together to host an event.
- **Identify your community's strengths and challenges.** Before going out into your community, it is important to understand what is working and where you are needed. For example, which CBO is successfully delivering its services to a wide scope of residents, and how can you support them? Additionally, where there is room for improvement there is an opportunity to engage. Is there a great deal of graffiti or litter in your neighborhood that you could organize a group to clean up?
- **Make it a win-win.** Make sure that there is something to gain for both you and your community partner. If you serve food donated from a local restaurant, help promote the business by placing a sign at your table thanking them for their generous donation and include a stack of their menus.
- **Remember you're not alone.** As an involved charter school parent you are representing parents, students, teachers, community members, and all charter school supporters. Remind those you're reaching out to that there are many people who stand with you.
- **Communicate often.** Building long-term relationships requires persistence. After holding an initial event with a community contact, stay in touch by mail, email, or phone throughout the year. Keep updating the community partner about your school's programs and successes, while continually looking for opportunities to work together.

How Are New York City Charter Schools Engaging in Their Communities?

DREAM Charter School's Family Action Council meets quarterly to collaborate with the PTA of PS 38, their co-located school. They discuss issues of importance and share tips on how to get families involved. For example:

- DREAM families shared an idea for a movie night that was successful at their school, and provided PS 38's PTA with fliers and materials to help them host a very successful movie night for their own families.
- In return, a PS 38 parent came to speak at DREAM's Career Day.

Harlem Link Charter School reached out to a variety of local community organizations to support their annual street fair:

- A local supermarket donated water for the staff.
- Local organizations provided prizes for the raffle.
- CBOs such as The Girl Scouts, Harlem Hospital, The Public Library, Kumon, and The Grace Institute set up stands to promote their services to Harlem Link families.



Peninsula Preparatory Charter School partnered with the local Kingsborough Community College to develop a variety of programs for their scholars, parents, and the rest of the community, such as:

- An after school performing arts program for their scholars, focusing on dance, theatre arts and music.
- A Beginners Computer Course, hosted by the charter school, and a Defensive Driving Course for parents and community members.

Peninsula Preparatory also partnered with Columbia University's Teacher's College, to offer workshops that enabled parents to see what their children were being taught in the classroom during the balanced literacy block.

The Renaissance Charter School created a forum for discussion in the community by hosting Teens for Racial and Ethnic Awakening (TREA), a teen group where students engage with other community groups for conversations about racial justice.

For sample letters and materials on how to engage with your community partners, see pages 20-25 in the appendix.



Engaging and Educating Local Officials

Elected officials are another important part of your community. Elected officials represent you and your community and are in a position to influence charter school legislation and policy. While many people only contact elected officials when there is a problem, it is important to engage with them year round in order to build long-term relationships.

The tactics for engaging elected officials are different than those used when building relationships with other community partners. Here are some recommendations:

For a sample letter on how to engage your elected official, see page 26 in the appendix.

WHO ARE YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS?

In addition to the NYC Mayor, your community is represented by a:

- Governor
- Borough President
- Assembly Member
- City Council Member
- State Senator
- U.S. Congressperson

Check out the Appendix to learn more about what your representatives do.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING AND EDUCATING YOUR LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

- **Educate the elected official about your school.**
 - Invite them to visit your school. A tour with school leaders and parents will help the elected official gain a better understanding of the culture and work.
 - Send a packet of information about your school, including press clips, photos from school events, or any materials that will illustrate your school's uniqueness. You can also send personalized letters notifying them of programs or ways you are building relationships with community partners.
- **Show gratitude.** Be sure to thank an elected official when they support your school's community in other ways, such as supporting certain legislation or building a new neighborhood playground.
- **Ask them to speak.** Most elected officials will not pass up the opportunity to speak to a captive audience of their constituents. Invite them to speak at a parent-hosted event that you are organizing. (Make sure you follow up with a thank you note.)
- **Alert them if the media will be coming to your school.** Elected officials appreciate press coverage. If you have invited media to your school's event, alert your elected official ahead of time.
- **Keep in contact.** Connect with your elected official on a quarterly basis. Keeping them updated on your school's actions will pave the way for a long-term relationship.
- **Volunteer in their office.** This is a great way to do your elected official a favor while also spreading the message about charter schools. The Policy & Advocacy team can help to partner you with an elected official's office.

Section III:

ADVOCACY

While community engagement is a long-term tactic for building strong mutually-beneficial relationships, sometimes an issue or challenge arises that needs to be dealt with in a more immediate and assertive way.

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is a process by which an individual or a group takes action to support a particular cause. Often the goal is to influence public policy and perception. If you are doing a successful job at engaging with your elected officials year round, it will be easier to get their attention when advocacy is necessary. The real key to advocacy, though, is the quantity and quality of the contact with policy makers.

CHARTER SCHOOL ADVOCACY DAY



Every year, thousands of NYC charter school supporters gather in New York's capitol for Charter School Advocacy Day. The event provides charter supporters with a highly visible way to get their message out to the state's politicians.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

- 1. Be prepared.** Before communicating with policymakers, be sure you're prepared to discuss what the problem is and what's needed. Prepare simple, direct materials that touch on your main points, provide rationale for your position, and include information on how you can be contacted.
- 2. Be organized.** Prior to meeting with policymakers, be sure to determine who in your group will speak, what they will speak about, and the order they will speak in. One person should lead the meeting, making sure that every point is made and that you stay on schedule.
- 3. Know who you're talking to.** Be sure that you do your homework on the person's background. For example, what are their public policy interests, what committees do they sit on, and what area do they represent? Knowing this information ahead of time can help you relate your issue to them in meaningful ways.
- 4. Work in coalition.** There's strength in numbers. Identify possible allies, whether other parents or CBOs, and explore the potential for collaboration whenever possible.

5. **Know the context.** Is there a budget deficit? Was a law recently passed that affects your issue? Stay well-informed of related government, political and social developments that could impact your issue and the goals you seek to achieve.
6. **Utilize staff.** In most offices, staff is an essential part of the policymaking process. This could be their Chief of Staff, Education Policy Analyst, or District Manager, among others. Don't be insulted if you meet with one of these people rather than the elected official, as gaining their support is an important part of the process.
7. **Be persistent.** Affecting public policy requires the application of consistent, strategically-placed pressure. Keep contact by mail, email, or phone throughout the year. Use your points of contact as opportunities to educate your elected official about current charter issues or those on the horizon.
8. **Follow-up.** Use any meeting with policymakers or their staff as a reason to communicate with them again. Send them a thank-you letter, reiterating your main points, answering any questions you may have left unanswered and again asking them for their support.

Approaches to Advocacy

There are many ways to advocate on behalf of your child and school. Advocacy can involve something as extensive as organizing parents for a rally, or as simple as writing a letter to your Council Member. Some examples of advocacy tactics are:

- Letter and email writing
- Phone calls and phone banking
- In-person meetings
- Flyers
- Testifying
- Online organizing

HOW TO ADDRESS AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

Mayor

The Honorable {First Last name}
 Mayor of New York City
 Dear Mayor {Last name}:

Governor

The Honorable {First Last name}
 Governor of New York
 Dear Governor {Last name}:

State Senator

The Honorable {First Last name}
 New York State Senate
 Dear Senator {Last name}:

State Assembly

The Honorable {First Last name}
 New York State Assembly
 Dear Assemblyman {Last name}:
 Dear Assemblywoman {Last name}:

Councilmembers

The Honorable {First Last}
 New York City Council
 Dear Councilmember {Last}

TIPS FOR WRITING AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

Letter writing is one of the best ways to make your voice heard by your local elected official. Every elected official's office tracks letters and calls from constituents. Most officials take time to read these letters themselves to make sure they are in touch with their community's needs and interests. Here are some tips for writing an effective letter to an elected official:

Step 1: Type it if you can. If you can't, handwritten letters are acceptable as long as they are neatly written.

Step 2: Address your letter using the proper etiquette (see page 11). Always address the elected official you are writing by their correct title. For example:

Date
The Honorable John Smith
New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Councilmember Smith:

Step 3: Introduce yourself. Let your elected official know who you are, where you live, and why you are writing.

My name is Jane Doe and I am a resident of District 40. I am writing to you today to ask for your support of legislation that will affect my child's charter school and others in [insert the name of your borough], New York.

Step 4: State your issue and why it is important to you. Clearly state the outcome that you wish to see happen. Personalize the issue by including your child's name, the name of the charter school and the community where it is located. If they have supported charter schools in the past, thank them and let them know how important their continued support is to you and your community.

Step 5: Explain how the legislation or policy change that you are advocating for will benefit your community.

Step 6: Conclude by thanking your elected official. If you are looking for a specific response, such as a letter, phone call, or attendance to a meeting, be sure to ask.

I am very appreciative for your time and attention to this matter. Please send a reply by letter or email to my home to inform me if you are committed to supporting charter schools in District 40.

Step 7: Include your mailing address, email address, and/or phone number to provide your elected official with a way of contacting you.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

[Insert your home address]

[Insert your phone number]

[Insert your email address]

Step 8: Report. Let your child's charter school know about your letter. Organized advocacy only works with coordinated actions.

See page 25 in the appendix for a sample letter advocating to your elected official.

TIPS FOR SENDING EMAIL

Email has revolutionized communication, but special care must be taken when using it as an advocacy tactic. The informal nature of email means that many elected officials do not take it as seriously as other methods of communication. Therefore if you do choose to use email to communicate with your decision-maker, make sure it is part of an ongoing relationship where other methods of contact are also used.

Most of the same tips apply as when writing a letter, but there are certain things to note when sending an email versus a letter:

- **The subject line is crucial.** Most elected officials have their staff sort and respond to email. If your subject line does not catch their attention, your email may not get read. For example, an effective subject line could read, "Message from a constituent on charter school issue."
- **Be clear and to the point.** Unlike a letter, email is meant to be informal and brief. Let your elected official know what you want them to do and why.
- **More is better.** Because emails are not physically presented before an elected official like letters are, it is especially important to send them in volume to prove effective. Recruit your friends, neighbors, family members and co-workers to send an email, too. Your one email might not persuade an elected official, but a full Inbox is sure to get their attention.

See page 28 in the appendix for a sample email to your elected official.

TIPS FOR MAKING EFFECTIVE PHONE CALLS

Making a phone call to an elected official is the quickest way to make your voice heard. You don't have to be an expert on the issue to be persuasive; you just need to give your personal perspective. Here are some tips on making an effective phone call:

1. **Plan first.** Know what you want to say before making the call. Write down a few notes so you are never caught speechless.
2. **Stay on message.** Your phone call will be very brief, so keep your message simple and to the point. "Please vote yes on XYZ legislation."
3. **Make the call.** Introduce yourself, declare that you are a constituent, and state the reason for your call, sticking to your planned script from steps 1 & 2.
4. **Be prepared to talk to staffers or leave a message.** You won't always reach an elected official directly. If you reach a staff member, get their full name and give them the same level of respect you would your elected official. If you have to leave a voicemail, have your message already prepared and speak slowly and clearly.
5. **Thank them.** Make sure to thank your elected official for their time and attention to your charter school issue.
6. **More is better.** Recruit your friends, neighbors, family members and co-workers to call too. Organize your fellow charter parents and start a phone-banking campaign. Your one call might not persuade an elected official but 100 calls from fellow constituents is sure to get their attention.
7. **Report.** Let your child's charter school know about your phone call. Organized advocacy only works with coordinated actions.
8. **Repeat.** Do it again next month. Consistently getting your message out there is the best way to ensure you are heard.

See page 29 in the appendix for sample phone scripts.

TIPS FOR PHONE BANKING

Phone banking utilizes the effectiveness of phone calls to reach and organize large numbers of people at once. They can be used to recruit volunteers, raise money, spread word about a legislative update, and increase attendance for events. Phone banking involves organizing a group of volunteers, or ‘phoners’, to sit in a room together and make calls to a wide constituency of people simultaneously. Here are some tips on organizing an effective phone bank:

- 1. Draft a phone script.** Keep your scripts simple and to the point. If you will leave a message on answering machines, have a script ready for it.
- 2. Gather volunteers.** Recruit twice as many as you need, and assume 90 minute shifts. Call your volunteers in advance to confirm that they’re coming.
- 3. Train your volunteers.** ALWAYS train your phone bankers. Be brief, but thorough, and role play / practice calls. Give phoners a clear and specific goal for each call and for how many calls to make.
- 4. Gather materials.** Having everything you need set up before you start making calls will eliminate the need to pause throughout your session and will maximize efficiency. Make sure you have things such as:
 - Phones – hard lines provided by you, or cell phones provided by your phoners
 - Drinks and snacks
 - Sign-in sheet
 - Extra copies of the script
 - Instructions
 - Talking points and background information
 - Pens, pencils, and note pads
 - Call list
 - Tally sheet
- 5. Set up the phone bank.** The layout and organization of the room is vital in creating an energetic, efficient phoning environment. The person in charge should be centrally located and able to greet new phoners immediately, and the phoners should sit together. Be sure to choose a room big enough to accommodate all your phoners without being too loud. Provide phone bankers with all material before they begin.
- 6. Make the calls.** Stick to the script while making it your own. Be sure to ask for the specific person on your list. Follow the instructions for marking responses on your call sheet. Leave the sheet blank if no answer or busy, but try and wait for 5 rings before hanging up.
- 7. Keep it short.** Don’t get into prolonged discussions—keep it moving.
- 8. SMILE.** You can hear it.
- 9. Manage your phoners.** It is important to keep communicating with your phone bank volunteers even after the set-up stage. Provide phone bankers feedback, support, and encouragement throughout the session. Also be sure to debrief and thank phone bankers after, and let them know what’s next.

TIPS FOR AN IN-PERSON MEETING

A face-to-face meeting with your decision-maker is an excellent opportunity to be seen, heard, and responded to. Unlike a letter or phone call, a meeting gives your elected official an opportunity to get to know you, while also time and the environment for a conversation permitting him/her to respond to your concerns and ask questions. A meeting can leave a lasting impression, and is worth the extra work that may be involved.

- 1. Plan ahead.** Will you be going alone or in a group? If you go as a group, decide who will lead the meeting and what each person will contribute. You will probably only have 15 to 20 minutes for your meeting, so plan accordingly.
- 2. Do your homework.** Research all there is to know about the elected official you are meeting with, including where he/she already stands on the issues you are bringing to them.
- 3. Stay focused.** Pick the one issue that is most important to discuss in the meeting and stay on message. Too many issues can be a distraction.
- 4. Be flexible.** Elected officials often have last-minute schedule changes. Don't be surprised if your meeting gets rescheduled. You may also meet with a staff member instead of the elected official, whose time is still very valuable. Be professional and courteous if either happens.
- 5. Meet on home turf.** Plan to meet your elected official at their community office or better yet, invite them to the charter school for the meeting.
- 6. Get personal.** Try to find out something personal about the elected official when you are doing your research on them. Do they live in your neighborhood? Do they share an interest or hobby? Engaging in casual "small talk" helps to bond the relationship and make you memorable, and also makes a natural transition into the conversation.
- 7. Invite questions and comments.** A dialogue is a conversation that goes both ways. Encourage questions and comments from your elected official and make sure to get back to them with any answers that you aren't prepared to give in person.
- 8. Record.** Feel free to have someone at your meeting taking notes. This will allow you to have a record of specific concerns raised by your decision-maker, while also having a source to refer back to when following-up with him/her in the future.
- 9. Report.** Let your child's charter school know about your meeting. Organized advocacy only works with coordinated actions.
- 10. Follow Up.** Remember to send a thank you note immediately after meeting with your decision-maker. Let them know how grateful you were for their time and for their support if they provided any. Be sure to include follow-up information if they requested it, or tell them when they can expect to receive it.

5 PARTS OF A CONVERSATION

These essential parts of a conversation may look a little different, or come in different order, or be of different length depending on the particular conversation:

Introduce—yourself: Tell who you are, where you're calling from, and why

Listen—to your audience: Ask questions to learn about them, and to engage them in the conversation

Inform—the hook: Tell them what they need to know about what you're doing, and why it matters

Engage—the ask: Make a specific, concise ask for what you need

Follow up—the close: Seal the deal, record any info they give you, and plan next steps for them

TIPS FOR FOR TESTIFYING

As a charter school parent and advocate, there might be an occasion when you are asked to testify at a committee meeting. This could include a Community Education Council (CEC) meeting, Panel for Education Policy (PEP) meeting, or other public meetings that offer open forums. Providing a testimonial is an opportunity for your voice to influence a committee's decision that could affect your school. Here are some tips to help it go smoothly:

1. Prepare your testimony notes beforehand and rehearse speaking them. Keep it brief and direct. It is okay to consult your notes later on during your testimony.
2. Sign up when you arrive. Look for the sign-up sheet, write your name clearly and follow any additional directions.
3. Be prepared to wait. It might take some time before the committee gets to charter school issues so be prepared to wait around until that time.
4. Wait until the committee chair recognizes you before you speak.
5. When called, state your name and whom you represent. "My name is Donna Smith and I am here to represent the parents of ABC Charter School."
6. Address the committee chair with the proper title, "Madame Chair" or "Mister Chairman."
7. Testify. Clearly state what your charter school position is and why. Remember it is okay to consult your notes during your testimony.
8. Wait for questions after you have finished. Anticipate ahead of time what these questions might be so you are not caught off-guard.
9. Wait to be excused by the committee chair.
10. Distribute handouts if applicable.

See page 31 in the appendix for a sample testimony.

How to Design a Flyer

Flyers are a great tool for quickly getting out your message to a number of people. They provide succinct written details for your audience to hold on to. You can target your audience broadly, by flyering all people in a given area or at a given event, or target very specifically, by sending flyers to a list of people. You may use flyers to get information to parents in students' backpacks or to a neighborhood by leaving them at doors, or to legislators by dropping them at their offices.

To be effective a flyer must be brief. It needs to provide these key things, and little else:

- **WHAT:** what is your issue or message?
- **WHY:** why should this matter to your audience?
- **WHO:** who is affected / included / invited?
- **WHEN:** when are people needed to take action, or expect action?
- **WHERE:** where is the event, or issue located?
- **CONTACT** information: to RSVP or find out more

SOME HELPFUL TIPS

- Your flyer should echo the central message of your effort
- Resist the urge to use elaborate photos and graphics
- Resist the urge to use many fonts, or bold—the more things “pop”, the less things “pop”
- Use brightly colored paper
- Flyers go fast—be sure to print enough
- Try to use less paper—a half-sheet or quarter-sheet is often as effective as a full sheet
- Upload your flyer to social media sites
- Include relevant email or website info

See page 32 in the appendix for a sample flyer.

SUPPORT OUR SCHOOLS
Rally for Our Children's Future

- Provide our kids with the resources they need
- Tell your legislators: maintain charter schools' autonomy!

STAND UP FOR OUR CHILDREN
Make their voices heard!

MEET FOR ACTION:
Tuesday, October 16
9:30-10:30 AM
OUTSIDE THE NY STATE OFFICE BUILDING
163 West 125th Street, Adam Clayton Powell Blvd.
2/3 trains, Malcolm X Blvd, and A/B/C/D 125th Frederick Douglas Blvd.

Please call (212)-437-8300 to RSVP

Online Advocacy and Organizing

The internet is a cost-effective and fast way to bring attention and awareness about your cause to a large group of people. Now more than ever, social media is being used to organize people and share ideas in a variety of ways. From email to online video to Twitter to Facebook, and with new networks being created all of the time, social media makes it easy to communicate en masse. While direct outreach is important, the online approach to stimulating conversation amongst the general public is also a vital tool in shifting public opinion and policy.

Here are some of the most commonly used social networking vehicles and how you, as a charter parent, can utilize them effectively:

EMAIL

Although you already know how to write an email to a community partner or elected official, it is often helpful to utilize email in organizing a large group of people for an event. Email is quick and easy, and an “email blast” (sending out one email to a large group of people) will save you valuable time. Consider using email to rally together a group of parents to attend a PEP meeting or to notify your community partners about an upcoming school event.

FACEBOOK

Facebook is currently the most popular social networking platform. Social networking sites like Facebook are online communities where people maintain virtual identities and connect with old and new friends. Individuals aren't the only ones who can create pages on Facebook; organizations and groups can have pages as well. Special pages can also be created for events. As a charter school parent, you could utilize Facebook by:

- Starting a page or group to advertise an event at your school, such as a fundraiser or concert.
- Posting a call to action, like a link to a petition in support of a piece of legislation.
- Updating your Facebook status to advertise for an event or bring awareness to an issue.

TWITTER

Twitter is a social media tool that allows people to communicate through “tweets,” short messages less than 140 characters long. The messages are brief and to the point due to their size constraints, making them easier for people to read than an email. You can utilize Twitter by:

- Tweeting from an event such as a rally or school fundraiser to bring awareness to your activities and encouraging others to attend (known as “live tweeting”).
- Tweeting about new legislation passed that will affect charter schools.
- Tweeting about events going on at your school.

YOUTUBE

Youtube.com is perhaps the most well-known site on the web for user-submitted video posts. YouTube is very user-friendly; it is easy to post a video of your own and its search function allows you to find what you're looking for among millions of videos.

- Post videos on YouTube of important events at your school such as school fundraisers, dance/choir performances, or speakers.

BLOGS

Blogs (or “web logs”) are online journals where people can log their personal views, post photographs, and encourage online discussion. They are usually written in first person and are generally less formal than traditional reporting. Some ways to utilize blogs are:

- Creating and updating a blog of your own.
- Staying in tuned with other blogs to influence online discussion. By posting comments on blogs, your voice can represent charter parents. For example, Chalkbeat (ny.chalkbeat.org) is a website that facilitates online conversations surrounding education in NYC through news articles and blogging.

WEBSITES

There are many organizations with websites geared toward helping you organize your community and effect change. These websites can also be a good place to find inspiration for engagement ideas for your own school.

- [Change.org](#): Serves as an online organizing platform for starting your own campaign.
- [DoSomething.org](#): Geared towards youth, Do Something is an online forum to empower kids and teenagers to take action and make change through volunteering.

- [Serve.gov](#): Run by the U.S. government, this website gives great tips and ideas for getting involved as a volunteer in your community.

Remember, you're not alone! Don't get overwhelmed. Please utilize our team and the services we're here to provide you with.



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A program of:

NEW YORK CITY
CHARTER SCHOOL
CENTER

It's about great public schools.