



Parents Across America Toolkit

For Parents, Teachers, and Communities

Educate * Organize * Mobilize

Our children, our schools, our voices.

www.parentsacrossamerica.org

How to organize around your education issue

- Network with your PTA, your School-based Council or School Leadership Team, your School board members, and/or the teacher union leader at your school.
- Have a meeting at your house, school, local café or other meeting place. You can also schedule conference calls through doodle and then use <http://www.freeconferencecall.com/>
- Sponsor a showing of the progressive education reform film, ***The Inconvenient Truth Behind Waiting for Superman***. (You can ask us to send you a DVD.)
- Develop a message: 3-5 sentences that communicate your position and your values. Include a clear statement of what you are FOR as well as what you're against.
- Decide on your goals or “asks”: a concise list of the outcomes that you want to achieve. Make sure they are as specific and measurable as possible and include your rationale.
- Ask parents to sign petitions in front of school and/or use online petition sites such as www.ipetitions.com or www.change.org. Change.org automatically sends messages to targeted elected officials. Petitions, either paper or online, are great for collecting contact info and developing an email list.
- Affiliate with Parents Across America and/or set up your own chapter by first checking out what we stand for at <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/what-we-believe/> and then emailing us at info@parentsacrossamerica.org

Use social media

- Form a Facebook “cause” and/or post your own website and/or blog. It’s free and only takes a few minutes!
- Free blog sites: www.blogger.com, <http://wordpress.com>, www.blogspot.com or write for our PAA blog!
- Sign up for Twitter at twitter.com; you will get followers fast! Develop your own “hashtag” for *Twitter*

Develop media contacts

- Identify reporters who cover stories that relate to your issues. Use media web sites to collect their e-mails, phone and fax numbers.
- Create an e-mail list for quick messages about your events and issues.

- Pick a friendly reporter and begin sharing interesting news items with him or her.
- Create 2-3 sound bites in advance of talking to reporters to communicate your message. Make sure you work those into your conversations with them.

Plan an event

- Have a rally, protest or press conference in front of your school, district office, City Hall, or other location related to your issue.
- Plan a house party, forum or town hall meeting, at your school, church or elsewhere.
- Be sure to invite elected officials, DOE, parents and education reporters at least a week ahead.
- Post the event at least two weeks ahead on your Facebook page or website.
- Email a brief press advisory the week before and then again the day before; put the reporters' emails in the BCC line, with the date of the event in the subject line, telling where, when and what. Be sure to provide a contact person w/ email and phone no., for more info.

At the event

- Be sure to ask someone to take photos and videotape event and post on YouTube and Flickr or other online site. Try to have appealing visuals, such as signs and/or children.
- Distribute a press release at the event, one or two page document, with quotes and sound bites from the participants.
- Send it out shortly after the event has taken place to all reporters and others who could not attend.
- Sample press release at www.classsizematters.org/final_press_release_Education_Nation_9.28.10.pdf

Advocacy

- Send letters and/or petitions with a cover letter to elected officials and key decision-makers, including at the state level. (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 include other parents in their district.
- Prepare succinct “talking points” to make sure of a coordinated message at a pre-meeting or conference call with other parents to coordinate roles and review goals for the meeting.
- Demand a written response and bug them until you get one.
- Do not forget to copy and/or contact other elected officials.
- Always send a follow-up thank you letter after meeting w/ them; reiterating your points and your asks.
- Follow up with emails to parents and reporters with regular updates about your issue.

How to 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! When you see news breaking that relates in any way to your issue, email or call reporters immediately. Reporters are always looking for relevant quotes from parents!
- Pick out a good sound bite first and repeat it frequently.
- Do not overuse your press email list or reporters will start treating your messages as spam.
- Also, write letters to the editor; do not forget the community papers, and keep them as short as possible! Or ask if they want an oped – find out the word limit and stick to it.

Key Advocacy Groups

Parents Across America (PAA): www.parentsacrossamerica.org a grassroots organization connecting parent activists from across the country to work together on improving our nation’s public schools. We advocate for proven, progressive measures like reducing class size and increasing parent involvement, and oppose corporate-style efforts to privatize our schools. PAA is committed to bringing the voice of public school parents – and common sense – to local, state, and national education debates.

Class Size Matters: <http://www.classsizematters.org/> is a non-profit, non-partisan clearinghouse for information to parents nationwide on class size and the proven benefits of smaller classes.

Parents United for Responsible Education: <http://pureparents.org> A Chicago-based organization, working to support a high quality public education by informing parents about education issues and parents’ rights, bringing parents into the decision making process, empowering parents in their role as advocates for their children, and assisting them in their interactions within the school system.