

Letters to the Editor

Local media are underused resources in grassroots advocacy. Letters to the editor can be powerful vehicles for influencing or inspiring public debate, making the case for your issue, or responding to related events. In addition, elected officials always read the opinion pages of their local paper, because it gives them an idea of what their constituents think. The trick is to write a letter that the editors find compelling enough to print.

Use these tips to write a letter that is more likely to get printed:

1. Capitalize on the hot stories. Find ways to tie in news stories with charter schools.
2. Keep it brief. Most letters to the editor should be under 250 words. Edit your letter aggressively.
3. Be clear. This may seem obvious, but a surprising number of letters that don't get published just plain don't make sense. Avoid jargon, use common vocabulary, and let a few friends or colleagues review the letter before you send it.
4. Use word cues to underscore your point. For instance, preface your major conclusion with "The important thing is ..." If you have research that makes your case, preface the facts with "Research proves that ..."
5. Don't overlook neighborhood weeklies and smaller papers. Often these publications have more room for letters, and community papers have very large readerships.
6. Include a call to action or solution. If you are illustrating a need or making a case for a specific action, include a line about what people can do to help.
7. Don't be afraid to toot your own horn. Share the successes and contributions of charter schools in your letter.
8. Be passionate, but not poisonous. There's a difference between "fire in the belly" and righteous indignation. Avoid sarcasm; if you're angry, cool off before sending a final version.
9. Use local or personal angles. All grassroots strategies rely on the local and the personal in an issue. Include this perspective in the letter to illustrate why readers should care about charter schools.
10. MCSN will coordinate meetings with editorial boards.

Source: Illinois Network of Charter Schools