

# **2004-05 GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**

## **For the Friends of Tri-County Area Schools**



MACOMB • OAKLAND • WAYNE

Compiled by the  
Tri-County Alliance for Public Education  
33500 Van Born Road  
Wayne, MI 48184  
734-334-1409 (o)  
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## You TOO can advocate for your school

Dear Tri-County Citizen,

Welcome to public school advocacy!

For a long time now, in Michigan, we have enjoyed the advantages of having a local public school system committed to providing an education for all the community's children. Recently though, with difficult economic times and challenging social issues, the demand has grown for public schools to deliver more with less. For your local public school district to deliver the quality of service you want, the time has come when it will require your voice, as community members and voters, to convince those whom we have elected, to make essential decisions that support our local schools.

This is an advocacy tool kit. In it you will find many of the "tools" you and other parents and community members can use to make a difference in how your elected officials in Lansing, and even the media, regard our schools. While the Tri-County Alliance for Public Education has created some of the se tools, including the TCA Legislative Report Card, many of the suggestions in these materials have been gleaned and redesigned from the good work of several other organizations. Among those we appreciate for publishing useful materials from which we have occasionally borrowed are the American Association of School Administrators, Michigan Association of School Administrators, Michigan Parent-Teacher-Student Association, Michigan School Public Relations Association and Oakland Schools.

Likewise, we appreciate the legislative research and planning of our three superintendent associations, the Macomb County Association of School Administrators, Oakland County Superintendents Association, and Wayne County School Superintendents Association, along with their corresponding intermediate school district offices.

We have recognized in the tri-county area that not one of our children can wait for the funding crisis in Michigan to pass. It's time to advocate. Let's get busy.

Sincerely,

Leonard R. Rezmierski, Ph.D.  
President

E. Kathleen Booher, Ed.D.  
Executive Director

Tri-County Alliance for Public Education

## COORDINATE your efforts

1. Meet with your superintendent, other school board and district representatives, and fellow advocates to identify together the critical issues in your school district.
2. Develop the KEY MESSAGES about these critical issues which you want to communicate consistently. You should have no more key messages than you can easily remember, probably 2, 3 or 4.
3. Plan all your advocacy activities toward the goal of communicating 1 or more of these key messages.
4. Determine WHAT activities you want to pursue, e.g., letters to the editor, a meeting with your state senator.
5. Develop a TIMELINE for getting these done.
6. Decide WHO will complete each activity.
7. Agree upon the GOAL: know ahead of time how you will define SUCCESS.

Now, use the ideas in this toolkit to help you get to work.



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## Build RELATIONSHIPS with your legislators.

Relationships. Relationships. Relationships.

Political lobbyists tell us that building ongoing RELATIONSHIPS with lawmakers is one of the most important things we must do. Contact with your legislators is likely to go more smoothly as a result. Legislators are people, too, and most will appreciate your interest and respond accordingly. Here are a few tips:

- Build these relationships, if possible, before you need to address a specific issue. You won't always be able to do that however. Work to build the relationships nonetheless.
- Be persistent in communicating. Michigan legislators are now "term limited" and have a great deal to learn about many issues in a short period of time. Don't let them lose track of the issues in your school district or what you want done about them.
- Legislators are in Lansing on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. They are in their "home" districts on Monday and Friday.
- Help your superintendent or building principal invite legislators to school events. It will help them know your district better and associate you with your community when they hear from you again.
- Take pictures of your legislators meeting with their constituents or speaking with students in your school district. *And, send them a copy.*
- Write thank you notes after the legislator talks with you or visits your child's school. Especially, thank your legislators after they have supported your position in a vote. A *handwritten* note is best. (You'd be surprised how few "thank you's" they receive).
- Don't stop. Keep the communication cycle working. You WILL encounter another issue and will want your legislator's support.



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## Write to -- or email -- your legislator

- ✓ Address your letter properly. All Senate mail goes to one P.O. Box, all House mail to another. Remember to include your full name and return address.

STATE SENATOR  
The Honorable (full name)  
State Senator  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 30036  
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
The Honorable (full name)  
State Representative  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Senator (last name):

Dear Representative (last name):

- ✓ You can easily email your legislators as well. Find your representative's name, phone number, and an email link at <http://house.michigan.gov/replist.asp> and your senator's at <http://senate.michigan.gov/SenatorInfo/senfull2003.hrm>.
- ✓ Start your letter with the KEY MESSAGE you want to communicate, and then add two or three paragraphs that offer examples or supporting evidence.
- ✓ Use your own words. Avoid using a form letter. Thoughtful, factual and well-reasoned letters carry more weight than form letters or printed postcards.
- ✓ State the bill or issue of concern to you. If it is a bill, give the bill number or describe it by a popular title, such as "The Election Consolidation bill."
- ✓ Explain how the issue affects your child, your family, your school district or your community.
- ✓ Suggest a solution or better alternative.
- ✓ Be as brief as possible. Legislators prefer 1-page letters that clearly state your opinion or argument.



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## Testify before a committee: ahead of time

- Write out your testimony so that you will clearly communicate one or more of your key messages to the committee. Make everything you say support those messages and those alone.
- Write it as a letter addressed to the committee chair with cc's for all the committee members.

STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
The Honorable (full name), Chair  
Education Committee  
State Representative  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

STATE SENATOR  
The Honorable (full name)  
Education Committee  
State Senator  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 30036  
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Dear Representative (last name):

Dear Senator (last name):

cc:  
Representative (full name)  
Representative (full name)

cc:  
Senator (full name)  
Senator (full name)

- State your key message(s) in your own words near the beginning of your testimony. Example:

*"I am here to tell you just how the state's funding problem is hurting the education of our children in [anytown]."*

- Use facts and figures sparingly and only those that directly emphasize your message. Example:

*"For the past three years, our district had to delay the purchase of new social studies textbooks in middle and high school because it hasn't had the \$100,000.00 it needed to buy the new books."*

- Make it easy for the legislators to remember your message by telling a relevant story about a child, a teacher, or an incident that is engaging and down-to-earth and illustrates your message well.

Example:

*"As a result, my daughter is still using a textbook that shows a map of the USSR with pictures of Presidents Gorbachev and Reagan. How does that help her learn about what is happening in Afghanistan?"*



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## Testify before a committee: ahead of time

- Carefully proofread your written testimony and ask a friend to proofread it as well.
- Keep it 1-2 pages written, about 3 minutes spoken.
- Make enough copies for all committee members and the media (roughly 15-20).



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## Testify before a committee: when you get there

- Fill out a testimony card requesting the opportunity to speak. Give it to the committee clerk.
- Be seated in the observers' chairs.
- Be patient and yet ready to speak when called upon. It is always possible you won't be called, especially if there are many people waiting to testify.
- When called, stand and move to the testimony table before the committee. Before sitting down, hand the committee's copies of your testimony to the clerk.
- Begin by greeting the committee, thanking the committee, and introducing yourself. Example:

*"Good afternoon Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_  
and members of the committee. Thank you for the  
opportunity to speak today. My name is  
\_\_\_\_\_, and I am a parent in the  
\_\_\_\_\_ school district."*

- Read your testimony to the committee or paraphrase and summarize it without reading if you are comfortable doing that.
- When done, thank the committee. Remain at the table if they have questions for you. If they thank you and excuse you, move back to your previous seat.



## Testify before a committee: afterward

- If you recognize a reporter whom you would like to have your information, quietly give him/her a copy of your testimony. Or talk with the reporter *outside* the committee room.
- Within a week, send a thank you card to the committee chair expressing your appreciation for the opportunity to speak to the committee. Include one or two sentences that restate your key message as a reminder to the chair.



## Letters to the editor: guide for writers

- Start your letter with the **KEY MESSAGE** you want to communicate, and then add two or three paragraphs that offer examples or supporting evidence.
- Write like it's a conversation. Use simple words, short sentences and frequent paragraph breaks. Don't use inflated words like "utilize" or "employ" when you really mean "use."
- Don't use derogatory words and don't commit libel, that is, call people names or accuse them of illegal acts. (Your letter probably won't get printed).
- Address your letter "To the Editor." You don't need a name for the inside address.
- Letters should include your name, home address and day/evening phone numbers. **SIGN** your letter, then type or print your name. This authenticates it.
- Anonymous letters are usually not considered. Most newspapers also reject letters written to a third party or another publication.
- If you submit your letter by email, send it from your personal/home web service since a letter to the editor is a reflection of your personal opinion.

### Tri-County Newspapers

#### DETROIT FREE PRESS

Editor  
600 W. Fort Street  
Detroit, MI 48226  
Email: [letters@freepress.com](mailto:letters@freepress.com)

- Put the letter in the text of the email, not as an attachment.
- 200 words or less, subject to editing.



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## Letters to the editor: guide for writers

### THE DETROIT NEWS

Letters

Editorial Page

615 W. Lafayette

Detroit, MI 48226

Email: [letters@detnews.com](mailto:letters@detnews.com)

Fax: 313.222.6417

- 250 words or less. Direct rebuttals to editorials may be up to 300 words, subject to editing.
- Letters become the property of The Detroit News.

The Detroit News accepts submissions of COMMENTARIES between 600 and 750 words on current public policy and societal issues on the local, state, national and international scene. The work must be the author's own and it must be exclusive to The Detroit News in Southeast Michigan. They do not accept articles that have been submitted to the Detroit Free Press. Submit to Richard Burr, Associate Editor/Features, Editorial Page, The Detroit News, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226, or fax to 313.222.6417, or email to [comment@detnews.com](mailto:comment@detnews.com).

### OAKLAND PRESS

Garry Gilbert, Executive Editor

P.O. Box 436009

Pontiac, MI 48343

Email: [vop@oakpress.com](mailto:vop@oakpress.com)

Fax: 248.332.8885

Letters to the editor can be mailed, emailed or faxed and should contain a maximum of 250 words. Guest opinions are limited to 600 words. Published items will only carry your name and hometown.

### OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC NEWSPAPERS

Editorial Page Editor

36251 Schoolcraft Road

Livonia, MI 48150

Email: [jbauman@oe.homecomm.net](mailto:jbauman@oe.homecomm.net)

Letters to the editor can be mailed, faxed or emailed. Letters to the editor should be no more than 300 words.



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# Letters to the editor: guide for writers

## SPINAL COLUMN

Spinal Column

7196 Cooley Lake Road

Waterford, MI 48327-4113

Email: [scncmgroup@aol.com](mailto:scncmgroup@aol.com)

Letters to the editor can be mailed or emailed.

[Other newspapers throughout the tri-county area will be added].



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## How to use the TCA legislators pledge.....

The Tri-County Alliance for Public Education is asking our legislators to take the *Our Kids Can't Wait: Legislator's Pledge of Support*. This pledge is the first step in a collaborative process between the legislator and your local district. We want this partnership to help create a legislative climate in Michigan that will foster the preservation of a high quality public school system and, as a result, a stronger state economy.

Here is how it will work:

1. In early December 2004, all state representative and senators, and the governor, will receive a letter and a copy of the pledge, from the Tri-County Alliance for Public Education, explaining to them the pledge and its purpose.
2. All superintendents will promptly follow up with their legislators, reinforcing the request that their legislators sign the pledge *and* thanking those who have.
3. Superintendents will communicate with their boards of education and their community advocates which legislators have signed the pledge and which have not.
4. Advocates may send thank you notes or emails to legislators who have taken the pledge and, to legislators who have not, a further request by phone, mail or email to make the commitment.
5. Advocates should feel free to use the content of the pledge at any point in the upcoming legislative session to communicate with a legislator who may benefit from a reminder.



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## Legislator's pledge: TCA letter to newly-elected representative

(date)

The Honorable (full name)  
State Representative  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Representative (last name),

Congratulations on your election to the House. It is an honor to be chosen by your fellow citizens to represent their interests in the Legislature. I wish you well as you begin your term of service.

I write you today on behalf of the 86 public school superintendents in the Detroit metropolitan area. I have enclosed our brochure, "A Road Map to Excellence and Equity for All Students," which describes our work.

You have been elected to serve during a time when our state's economy continues to falter. Many public services have been scaled back or eliminated due to tight budgets. Despite Governor Granholm's and the Legislature's sincere efforts to minimize the reductions to education, the public schools in local communities are operating with diminishing funding and rising costs. Creating further challenges, school districts have been burdened by an increasing pace of federal and state legislation. Too often, legislation has been introduced without a full understanding of its costs and intended benefits to all schools, not to mention a thorough analysis of its *unintended* impact on the system as a whole.

These converging trends – shrinking funds and increasing mandates – are a threat to the quality of education in our tri-county communities. I ask you to help reverse these trends and restore the support our local communities need to properly educate their children.

I am sure that issue research will be important to you in your public service. The superintendents of the Tri-County Alliance, along with their boards of education, staff members and parent leaders, are an invaluable resource for you as you pursue the information you need to create sound education policy. I ask that you work consistently with these representatives of your local school district(s) when considering legislation that affects schools.

Further, in the interest of forging this working relationship, I ask you to read and sign the enclosed Legislator's Pledge of Support. Please make this commitment to the students in your legislative district today in the interest of their futures and of Michigan's. Please return your signed pledge to me in the enclosed envelope, and I will gladly share your commitment with your local school district(s).

I welcome any opportunity to be helpful. Please call upon me.

Best wishes,

E. Kathleen Booher, Ed.D.  
Executive Director

## Legislator's pledge: TCA letter to re-elected representative

(date)

The Honorable (full name)  
State Representative  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Representative (last name),

Congratulations on your re-election to the House. It is an honor to be chosen by your fellow citizens to represent their interests in the Legislature. I wish you well as you begin your term of service.

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## Legislator's pledge: TCA letter to newly-elected senator

(date)

The Honorable (full-name)  
State Senator  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 30036  
Lansing, MI 48905-7536

Dear Senator (last name),

Congratulations on your election to the Senate. It is an honor to be chosen by your fellow citizens to represent their interests in the Legislature. I wish you well as you begin your term of service.

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Executive Director

**Legislator's pledge: TCA letter to re-elected senator**

(date)

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State Senator  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 30036  
Lansing, MI 48905-7536

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Best wishes,

E. Kathleen Booher, Ed.D.  
Executive Director



MACOMB • OAKLAND • WAYNE

## ***Our Kids Can't Wait:*** **Legislator's Pledge of Support**

As a legislator elected to serve my community which lies within the boundaries of Macomb, Oakland and Wayne Counties, I recognize that public education has long provided the foundation for our democratic way of life and for an educated workforce. In the interest of a positive future for the tri-county region and our economy, I pledge to commit my efforts to the establishment of policy that assures the quality of public education in our region. Further, I promise to be a vocal advocate for the children of the tri-county area and will take action to make education a funding priority.

Recognizing that the education of tri-county kids *cannot wait for the funding crisis to pass*, I pledge to work to:

- Advocate for the needs of preschool children.
- Fully fund programs for special education and at-risk students and other existing categorical programs.
- Support legislation that will enhance the ability of neighborhood public schools to deliver high quality services.
- Vote to annually increase the foundation allowance to at least keep pace with the cost of living.
- Increase oversight and accountability for public school academies (charter schools) that are equal to those in place in traditional public schools.
- Resist raising the cap on the number of public school academies.
- Support the constitutional requirement that the State Board of Education complete a study to determine the costs of providing an adequate and equitable education to all children.
- Approve legislation that will support Michigan's commitment to local control.
- Halt bureaucratic requirements and unfunded mandates.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## How to use the TCA legislative report card

In 2005, the Tri-County Alliance for Public Education is launching a legislative report card for tracking the activities of our region's legislators on bills that affect our schools. On a bill-by-bill basis, the Alliance will inform legislators of what position we believe supports and protects our public schools' ability accomplish their mission in the community. The TCA Legislative Report Card will be issued in June and in January each year to the tri-county area's legislators, media and school superintendents.

Here is how the report card will be used:

1. The Tri-County Alliance leadership and superintendents will inform legislators about the report card process no later than the end of January 2005.
2. When bills are proposed that superintendents believe would have a significant impact on local schools, the TCA will notify legislators of the TCA's position on those bills.
3. Depending on the impact of the bills, favorable and unfavorable, superintendents may call upon their school district's community advocates to communicate with specific legislators.
4. These bills will be recorded, and all tri-county legislators' corresponding votes, on the report card.
5. As each legislative session comes to a close, final considerations will be given to each legislator's activity during the previous six months, and a letter grade of A, B, C, D, F will be assigned.
6. The TCA will release the report card results to the legislators, to the media and to superintendents who will make this information a part of their communication and planning with their school districts' community advocates.



# Legislative report card: superintendent's letter to legislator

(date)

The Honorable (full name)

...

Dear Representative/Senator (full name),

I received a copy of your (midterm report card/final report card) from the Tri-County Alliance for Public Education. I see that you received a grade of (A/B/C/D/E) for your legislative work which affects schooling for the children and youth in (school) district).

------(Choose one depending on legislator's grade/performance)-----

### For good work, A or B

I want to thank you for (a specific action such as initiating or supporting a favorable bill or voting against an unfavorable one). This is an important stand you took which will (spell out the positive impact of the legislator's action for your school district's priorities). (Add 1 or 2 sentences specific to the benefits for your district, especially for students.)

### OR for mixed work, C

I recognize the difficult decision you made on (a specific action that was not favorable). The regrettable impact of that will be (describe negative impact on your district and its students). (Ideally, suggest an alternative action and why it would have been better for your district and its students.) On the other hand, I was glad to see that (spell out the positive impact of the favorable action relating it to a TCA priority if possible.)

### OR for poor work, D or E

I was disappointed to see that you (describe specific action that was not favorable). The regrettable impact of that will be (describe negative impact on your school district's students relating to a TCA priority if possible). (Add 1 or 2 sentences specific to the detriments for your school district's students.) (Ideally, suggest an alternative action and why it would have been better for your school district's students.)

-----Closing Paragraph-----

(A/B Congratulations on a good report card!) or (C/D/E Better luck next marking period on your report card.) I look forward to being of help to you anytime you consider legislation that may have an impact on the schools in (district name). If you have a question I can't answer, I pledge to help you find someone who can. Also, remember you are always welcome in (school district). Just give me a call whenever you want to visit.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

## Legislative report card: board president's letter

Outline for a Letter from the BOARD PRESIDENT of (school district)  
to the Rep/Senator.

(Specific content information for bracketed portions will be provided by TCA.  
Board President is welcome to reword and customize the letter. This format is merely a  
suggestion.)

## Legislative report card: concerned parent letter

Outline for a Letter from the PTA/PARENT COUNCIL PRESIDENTS  
of (school district) to the Rep/Senator.

(Specific content information for bracketed portions will be provided by TCA.  
Parent rep is welcome to reword and customize the letter. This format is merely a suggestion.)

## Legislative report card: community leader's letter

(future)

Outline for a Letter from the PRESIDENT OF LOCAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE of (school district) area to the Rep/Senator.

(Specific content information for bracketed portions will be provided by TCA.

Chamber President is welcome to reword and customize the letter. This format is merely a suggestion.)