



TEACHER VOICE OP-ED TOOLKIT

In 2018, charter school advocates worked together to learn more about the most effective ways to message public charter schools to a public audience. Through this research, we learned that narrative-driven public charter school messaging works best and is particularly compelling when coming from a teacher voice.

TEACHER VOICE FINDINGS

Charter school advocates need to lead with student and teacher voices. Encouraging teachers to speak up for charter schools is essential to the movement because it denies critics the ability to define charters and charter advocates as anti-teacher.

We need teachers to:

- Speak to the ways charter schools have empowered and supported them in the classroom.
- Help define the motives of charter schools and push back on teacher-focused attacks.

DRAFTING TEACHER-VOICE OP-EDS

- **The Lede** – Sets the scene and instantly hooks the reader. The piece should be timely and built around a current news hook.
- **The Thesis** – Statement of purpose in service of your persuasive argument.
- **The Support** – Three main points backed by statistics or evidence.
- **The Call to Action** – The action the author wants readers to take away.
- **The Conclusion** – Circle back to the lede and finish on a memorable note.

HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY

Op-eds should fit specific storytelling arcs that ladder-up to broader key messages. Two common types of effective teacher op-ed story arcs include:

- **Bringing a Creative Approach to Teaching** – A teacher who starts an innovative program at their school that has real-world relevance. The teacher can speak to their motivations in creating the program and the impact it has had on student learning and society.
- **Advocating for a Policy Issue or Social Cause that Affects the Classroom** – Teachers are highly credible sources for opinions on policies and/or social issues that affect the classroom. The teacher may draw on his/her experience as an educator to illustrate their argument or perspective.

HOW TO WRITE AND PLACE YOUR OP-ED

- **Identify the media markets you want to target.** Research the print and online news outlets in your community or state that accept guest op-eds.
- **Identify a high-performing charter school in that market.** You can check the academic quality of the charter school on [greatschools.com](https://www.greatschools.com).
- **Reach out to the school leader and ask them for the name of a teacher that's suitable for this project.** A credible author may be a teacher who has been at the school for three years or longer and someone who is passionate about the school.
- **Reach out to the teacher and ask them to provide answers to eight questions (see below).** As we all know, teachers are crunched for time and this may seem like one extra to-do on their plate. Instead of asking them to pen the op-ed, ask them to answer a few questions about their background and why they love their job. You can send them the question guide below or offer to set up a call and talk through their answers.
- **Reach out to the teacher and ask for both a high-resolution headshot, and a photo from school.** If the teacher submits a photo that has students in it, please ensure that parental permission has been granted or a media release has been signed that states the photo can be shared publicly. If permission cannot be granted, please only submit the headshot to the newspaper.
- **Take their answers and turn them into an op-ed.** Using their words, add in transitions and turn the Q&A into a formatted op-ed. Aim for about 800 words, which is the standard op-ed length, but be sure to check with the publications you are targeting to ensure you meet their requirements.
- **Contact your regional or community newspaper and send the piece in via email. Be sure to follow-up!** If your op-ed is not initially chosen at a community newspaper, be sure to send it to other local newspapers to see if they would like to publish it instead. Always include by-line information about the author in addition to a persuasive pitch to the newspaper.

For questions about writing or submitting an op-ed, feel free to reach out to [Shaelyn Macedonio](#), Sr. Manager of Media Relations at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

TEACHER OP-ED Q&A TEMPLATE

Name:

Charter School:

Grade or Subject You Teach:

- Where did you go to college, how long have you been teaching, and how long have you been at your current school?
- How did you get into teaching, and why did you decide to become a teacher?
- How do you describe your school to someone who doesn't know anything about it?
- What makes your school special and unique?
- Why do you love teaching at your school?
- How does your school meet the individual needs of students?
- Do you think the fact that you're teaching at a charter school - where you're not part of a big bureaucracy or district - allows you to thrive as a teacher? In what ways?
- What do you love most about your job?

Always include a high-resolution headshot in your submission as well. Most photos taken on cell phones are fine, but do not resize, edit, crop, or add filters to ensure that the resolution remains high.