

THE Center for Education Reform



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHARTER SCHOOL PROGRAM AND INITIATIVES OF THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM

Advocacy, Action, Results

The Center for Education Reform has long recognized that education reform begins and ends at the grassroots. The stronger and better prepared local organizations are to pursue reform initiatives, the more likely those initiatives are to eventually become law; the better grassroots groups and activists can maintain their strength and influence, the better the chance that those laws will, in the end, be effective as mechanisms for change.

Consequently it has been a longstanding goal of the organization – and a primary focus of its ongoing work – to build and sustain state-based infrastructures in support of charter school reform efforts around the country. CER provides direct assistance to state and local charter leaders in developing sound, mature and permanent infrastructure support systems and serves as a conduit for the transfer of knowledge between groups both intra- and interstate.

These efforts are in addition to CER's commitment – since its founding – to building a national awareness and engaging federal policy support for charter schools. CER also continues to work with states as specific

needs arise on a range of critical education reform-related issues, and in helping all reformers – from parents, to legislators, to teachers and administrators, and beyond – continue to gain an understanding of those issues and the steps they can take to advocate for and affect change.

CER has a staff at its headquarters that is specifically dedicated to its national and state-based charter efforts. The staff provides direction, research and communications support to each state leader and works with planning teams in each state to help them identify and pursue worthwhile initiatives. CER also includes advisors, with insights into the states and experience in policy making and business development, as expert consultants on key issues. (Washington, DC Councilmember Kevin Chavous, for example, a leading supporter of charter schools with deep roots in Indiana, is included among CER advisors.)

CER's work in the states falls into five categories: strategic support, tools & training, connections & leadership, information & research, and advocacy and analysis.





A SNAPSHOT OF ACTIVITIES

Strategic Support

CER has designed and implemented a number of focused, parent-led grassroots campaigns that have been successful in creating new charter school laws, improving existing laws and fighting rollback attempts. Through the creation of state-specific plans, CER has helped partner groups achieve organizational, legislative, media outreach and other goals that are key to grassroots success.



CER identifies and supports individuals and groups who are interested in grassroots activism and in starting charter schools, and provides practical guidance and advises groups on how to approach incumbent school board members and lawmakers and on how to run new candidates. The Center also hosts strategic-planning workshops and conference calls with grassroots leaders to help formulate and shepherd efforts.

Tools & Training

Giving people the tools they need to carry out their efforts often spells the difference between their success and failure. The Center provides a variety of “toolkits” to position people for success. These toolkits also equip parents and others to address matters such as how to approach legislators, how to start a group and manage group efforts, how to start a charter school, and other how-to guidance.



CER also plays an active role in the ongoing legal and legislative battles surrounding school choice, including the submission of amicus briefs in charter and choice litigation, supplying attendees at numerous state charter school conferences with important and timely materials relating to key school reform issues, and providing guidance on organizing and coordinating rallies and news conferences.

The Center also undertakes special efforts to provide guidance for others to reach out to disenfranchised families, African-American and Latino parents, with messages on the benefits of choice and charter schools.

CER cultivates new supporters by reaching out to people who are not in the know and supplies them with the tools that draw them in to support and assist reform.



THE Center for Education Reform



Connections & Leadership

The greater the connections between grassroots groups and activists, the greater the strength of their efforts. The Center for Education Reform works to help ensure that its many allies at the state and local levels are not isolated from one another or from important contacts in Washington, DC and elsewhere.



The Center does this by sponsoring and co-sponsoring conferences and workshops on pertinent issues that bring people together to meet with, and learn from one another. We provide annual support for National Charter Schools Week, including the spearheading the CER-initiated Congressional Salute to Charter Schools and the production of School Action Kits to help schools celebrate. CER also organizes tours of charter schools to give local, state and federal policy makers a chance to connect with charter leaders, parents and students.

CER maintains close relationships with state and federal legislators and departments of education to build and extend support for charter schools and keep open the lines of communications between them and those working in charter schools and in the charter school movement. CER policy staff provide advice to state and local business leaders on how to get involved with and invest in their communities' charter schools, assist state organizations in addressing political issues and challenges, and deliver numerous presentations and speeches throughout the year.

CER shares its influence with local people, and connects key leaders at the grassroots level with high-profile national, regional and state media contacts, as well as with other CER members, opinion leaders and policy makers in order to extend the range and impact of their messages. This is in addition to the submission of numerous letters to editors and op-ed pieces in support of state and local efforts that CER does annually.

Information & Research

Information truly is power and the broader its dissemination the greater the potential impact that information can have on advancing ideas and creating change. Since its founding, The Center for Education Reform has worked tirelessly to gather information and, most importantly, to get it into the hands of friends and allies at the state and local levels.

CER maintains the nation's largest collection of data on charter schools, their achievements, the ripple effects of their work, the obstacles faced, the schools that have closed, and more. It makes



THE Center for Education Reform



that information available through regular publications including [Charter Schools Today: Changing the Face of American Education, Statistics, Stories and Insights](#). The Center also conducts the [Annual Survey of Charter Schools](#) and publishes the [National Directory of Charter Schools](#), the only comprehensive listing of charter schools in the country.

The Center consistently reaches out to and follows up with local, state, and national reporters to build and maintain media interest in charter schools and education reform. We regularly disseminate news about top charter schools to the public, and produce and distribute our weekly Newswire e-mail to keep our many constituencies informed of and involved with key charter and reform issues nationally. Also, the president's Monthly Letter to Friends – the flagship bird's eye view of reform produced since CER was founded – serves as a much-relied upon source of school reform and charter-related information for the more than 250,000 individuals from throughout the nation who read it regularly.



This is in addition to the wealth of information maintained on the Center's award-winning website, and to the dozens of CER-produced backgrounders, white papers, fact sheets, books and brochures that are available through CER to meet the public's demand for information and answers on education reform issues.

Analysis & Advocacy

The Center for Education Reform provides ongoing analysis of, and serves as an active advocate for, education reform initiatives in states across the nation. CER's staff maintains expertise on all charter issues such as finance, elements of law, the effects of traditional mandates and at least 30 additional factors that influence laws. CER initiates contact between state charter school leaders and policy makers on pending issues and works to proactively inform and educate legislators about issues that need their attention, including the drafting of bills and amendments.



CER's staff also assists state leaders with research. Dozens of state people are on the phone each week with CER staff, who conduct expert analysis of, and recommended language for, charter school laws and amendments and provide expert testimony at legislative hearings. Additionally, CER tracks federal legislation and provides direction to leaders on Capitol Hill and a wide range of analyses to their staffs.





CER'S TARGET STATES INITIATIVE

Building State Capacity for Quality Charter School Growth

Each year CER targets key states where prospects for reform, or opportunities for meaningful movement toward reform, are greatest – and where CER's work has the greatest potential to add value to state and local efforts. These efforts focus almost entirely on creating a positive environment for charter schools. Over the years, the approach has become more refined, moving from an opportunistic profile to a more strategic approach allowing for better program planning, initiatives that are better geared to state and local need, and more effective program deployment.



The targeted efforts include formation of strategic partnerships with one primary contact or coalition in each area and the setting down of specific goals to guide the partnership and activities. While initiative components vary from state to state, CER has developed a set of tangible, strategic, and highly regarded programs that transcend state differences and that can significantly impact the development of an environment that fosters increased sophistication of charter school infrastructures and the growth of high quality charter schools.

The goals of the initiative are to build and sustain strong state infrastructures that have a victorious impact on: a strong accountability system including each state organization's assistance in the development and follow-through in the gathering, analysis and reporting of data which are critical to accountability; development of political strength; increased public awareness of charter schools; reduction in the number of obstacles that hinder the success and growth of charter schools; and in the number of attempts made by charter opponents to rollback legislation favorable to charters.

TARGET STATES 2004-2005

The following areas are primary targets where CER is engaged in whole or in part. Other states benefit from the work as they solicit CER's help.

- ◆ Arizona
- ◆ California
- ◆ District of Columbia
- ◆ Louisiana
- ◆ Michigan
- ◆ New Jersey
- ◆ New York
- ◆ Texas
- ◆ Washington State
- ◆ Maryland (Baltimore)





THE PROGRAM, TOOLS AND SERVICES

All of the programs CER engages in with state partners can be broken down into three major stages of engagement:

Assessment: includes survey and focus groups, frequent site visits to the state and meetings with key stakeholders.

Strategic Planning: includes the definition of the organization's mission and goals, and the development and implementation of the business plan.

New Program Activation: providing direction in implementing key programs as defined in the business plan.

Key tools and services provided by CER as part of its Target States Initiative include:

Survey Research

...to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Efforts include an environmental assessment to understand key players and the political dynamics driving reform efforts (and opposition to it), and independent evaluations of partners to gain perspective on their work and others' perceptions of it.

State Focus Groups

...to obtain a more in-depth assessment of the environment in the state. Key members of the charter community are brought together and asked to discuss the movement's biggest challenges and strengths, and to provide recommendations for improvement. The focus groups are facilitated by an independent research firm.

Strategic Planning

...to provide guidance in the development of the mission and goals of any new organization designed to support charter stakeholders as well as professional facilitators. CER helps to recruit and identify key leaders to become part of a steering committee that will work over a 6-9 month period to create a workable framework that will result in bigger, better, stronger charter support organizations.

Business Development Plan & Advice

...once the strategic plan has been developed and refined, the next step is to develop a sound business plan that will be used to build and expand capacity and to implement the programs defined in the strategic plan. CER will deliver resources and research in the development and implementation of the business plan.



THE Center for Education Reform



Organizational Support

...to provide assistance in setting up the organization and helping to develop programs such as Parent Advocacy, Media Training and Technical Assistance. CER also provides feedback about the organization's effectiveness and intervenes if the organization falls short. The Center helps to facilitate partnerships or coordinates tapping into additional growth and funding opportunities. It plugs the organization into the national effort.

Public Relations and Marketing

...and awareness of charter schools is the final state tool CER offers to its partners. Messages have been developed and are placed in high-traffic areas that have been market-tested to work for families. CER implements public relations campaigns and also teaches organizations how to do it.

CER'S BLUEPRINT FOR STATE INFRASTRUCTURE

The basis for CER's expertise comes from 10 years of cultivating, watching and supporting state and local charter efforts. Much of the extraordinary success comes from state groups, which often started as (and some of which remain) small, unsophisticated groups of people working in tandem. The successes and the many mistakes made along the way provide the best source of information for best practices.

CER researched the people, groups and advances, and with state advisors, created its Blueprint for State Infrastructure. The Blueprint now serves as a guide, a starting point, a checklist for the many state representatives with which CER works to better the charter environment. Having an effective and goal-centered organization is a critical component of steady, quality charter school growth. CER is the only organization that is providing the seasoned expertise to develop these organizations and help impact their programs. This Blueprint is available at the back of this outline.

THE PARTNERSHIP

CER limits its comprehensive state work to selected states, to leverage its resources and ensure maximum focus. Inquiries and new opportunities are explored on a case-by-case basis.





BLUEPRINT FOR STATE INFRASTRUCTURE

There are four major categories of work to be done that every state's charter schools need and which transcend state differences. The following Blueprint outline assumes one unified structure in a state, with four main divisions of work. Each of those divisions intersect and are related. The question is, how does a particular state unite these functions best, in order to meet the needs and demands of charter schools and ensure healthy growth of quality schools that are politically strong and publicly responsive?

I. Technical Assistance (The Blueprint)

This is defined as consistent, ongoing, planned-out support to schools on all school-based operations, and a degree of technical trouble shooting. Following is a list of products and services that should be conducted in this area.

- ◆ Provide model programs, policies and procedures
- ◆ Provide assistance regarding management procedures (i.e. how to handle a board interview, setting up meetings with local political leaders, generating parent interest)
- ◆ Governance/Board Training
- ◆ Back room nuts & bolts
- ◆ Provide support for schools to collect, manage and report their school/student data
- ◆ Start-Up Assistance:
 - ◆ Coordination of task list
 - ◆ Information on and referral to facilities services (maintain lists and contacts)
 - ◆ Information, referral, and (where necessary) establishment of staffing process
 - ◆ Information and (where necessary) establishment of student recruitment process
 - ◆ Information and referral for 2nd tier activities such as food service, transportation, textbooks, student records, etc.
- ◆ Program Implementation: Behavior Management, Curriculum, Instructional practice, Title I & NCLB, Special Education
- ◆ Provide regular facilities financing guidance and expertise
- ◆ Identify and announce public and private grant information
- ◆ Create a charter specific, members-only extranet that would serve as a place where designated state leaders only can go to exchange updates, ideas, and get information from colleagues pursuing similar issues





I. Technical Assistance (The Blueprint) Continued

- ◆ Intervention into school troubles, especially those concerning financial or academic deficiencies
- ◆ Support to correct deficiencies
- ◆ Communication with authorizer on positive and trouble spots

II. Advocacy (The Blueprint)

This is where all external affairs are placed, including but not limited to communications and PR, sales and marketing of issues and ideas, legislative development and advancement, and grassroots support and development.

- ◆ Data Collection: Create a massive index on each school, including specific research about and data points on charter schools
 - a) Student achievement progress data (standardized testing data as well as other data marking school success and progress)
 - b) demand information (enrollment figures, waiting list data, other)
 - c) parental satisfaction data (annual, parent survey data)
- ◆ Design and conduct a three-year plan for strategic and political alliances that define contact among schools and community, opinion and political leaders
- ◆ Research all charter stakeholders, including pro- and con- groups
- ◆ Identify and analyze all existing education groups, academicians, think tanks, etc. and their stances on charter schools; publish and regularly update all existing their positions
- ◆ Identify institutions that serve minorities the best by region
- ◆ Coordinate outreach efforts with local, state and national BAEO efforts
- ◆ Develop a program connecting supportive minority individuals with legislators
- ◆ Provide “cover” for choice-friendly legislators
- ◆ Sponsor “road trips” to state where institutions have existing charter partnerships. Create interstate links with these groups where they are present in several states
- ◆ Create a strong coalition around public school educators supportive of charters
- ◆ Conduct educational workshops for teachers, school board members and superintendents
- ◆ Legislative Activity:
 - ◆ Publish voting records relevant to charter schools
 - ◆ Legislative and Administrative analysis and lobbying (Develop strategies for individual legislators who can be targeted)
 - ◆ Create a calendar for dropping specific news items, letters, etc., in and around the legislative calendar





II. Advocacy (The Blueprint) Continued

- ◆ Conduct special luncheons/receptions with key in-state or out-of-state business leaders to influence state leaders
- ◆ Accompany willing business leaders to legislative hearings and meetings with policymakers
- ◆ Create relationships with executive branch officials to ensure that schools receive fair treatment for grant funding
- ◆ Identify opportunities to enhance and/or develop favorable legislation or procedures for creating charter facilities
- ◆ Review and generate customized reports of specific lobbying strategies engaged in the past with detailed analysis of results
- ◆ Research and provide background for lobbyists who oppose or support charter school movement
- ◆ Provide research on legislative provisions that either help or inhibit development of facilities for charter schools
- ◆ Public Relations:
 - ◆ Develop a clear set of messages/themes and market to groups, opinion leaders, policymakers, etc.
 - ◆ Generation of descriptive and pro-charter material
 - ◆ For individual schools (calendar of events to publicize, writing of releases, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor)
 - ◆ Cultivation of media relationships (at the state and school level)
 - ◆ Charter school events and forums
 - ◆ Policy Analysis (generate material that can be used for pro-charter public relations)
 - ◆ Create National Charter Schools Week agenda/activities
- ◆ Grassroots Organizing:
 - ◆ Relationships with legislators at the school level (this must be actively managed)
 - ◆ Outreach to the decision-makers in the community
 - ◆ Publicize success stories
 - ◆ Create profiles on what makes a great school
- ◆ Media Relations:
 - ◆ Analyze editorial board views and reporter coverage towards charters
 - ◆ Pitch specific stories, results of focus groups, etc.
 - ◆ Provide media training for all likely and potentially strong spokespeople
 - ◆ Connect legislators/business people to editorial board meetings once people are organized
 - ◆ Identify new, non-traditional media in minority communities and make direct pitches to these media with minority spokespeople





III. New School Development (The Blueprint)

This division is responsible for identifying needs by community and working to match those with proven models and interested applicants to invite their possible application to the state, as well as to help new applicants be strong and aligned to critical demands from the start.

- ◆ Create and maintain data on all applicants to the state and compose experts list for referral to potential new applicants
- ◆ Work individually with applicants to fulfill requirements of a strong application process and to combat potential authorizer obstacles
- ◆ Facilitate communication with authorizers to ensure alignment of goals of applicant with authorizer
- ◆ Coordinate workshops on how to complete an application
- ◆ Review and provide guidance for the draft applications
- ◆ Research and engage in discussions with successful charter schools
- ◆ Generation of supportive media for applicants
- ◆ Proactive and constant recruitment of applicants
- ◆ Host pro-charter events
- ◆ Reach out to community based organizations
- ◆ General and detailed training for operators
- ◆ Facilitate the sharing of best practices among the most successful charter schools
- ◆ Provide models and contacts for the purpose of adopting curriculum, training, standards alignment, financial reporting
- ◆ Develop new membership category in organization, to provide special place and set of contacts for new applicants
- ◆ Network with other states and attend conferences to make contacts





IV. Parent Networking (The Blueprint)

While the role of advocacy involves organizing, parents are unique in their needs and ability to help schools advance their agendas. Parents must be more informed first and foremost about what it means to have a child in a charter school and schools need to better understand motivations of first-choice parents. Parents with information can be trained and organized, to support their school and to advance its cause politically.

- ◆ Develop databank of parents, parent groups, history of interaction among various groups and public officials
- ◆ Train schools to organize parents
- ◆ Design education/informational workshops and user-friendly tools (for multiple audiences) that introduce individuals to appropriate guides and "how to" resources/books:
 - ◆ "What is a Charter School?"
 - ◆ "How to Choose Your School?"
 - ◆ Generic statistics
 - ◆ Material that describes myths and realities relating to charter schools
- ◆ Research and develop a customized, easy-to-read newsletter (ex: "Did you know" format, etc., targeted to parents about both specific and more general charter school issues)
- ◆ Collect and disseminate data on existing parent groups
- ◆ Set up booths at fairs and community events
- ◆ Help parents establish school-based associations and connect them with other home-school, PTA or PTO organizations among all charter schools
- ◆ Identify family magazines and weekly newspapers which parents read to identify local events and school-related news, etc.
- ◆ Provide parent-only tools to use, distribute and write:
 - ◆ Letters to the editor
 - ◆ Questions for policymakers
 - ◆ School checklists
- ◆ Organize leadership training for parents on waiting lists or parents who want to advocate for charters
- ◆ Organize Lobby Day at the Capitol
- ◆ Send regular monthly testimonials about children successes to lawmakers
- ◆ Identify the critical "legitimate" leaders of parental groups



THE Center for Education Reform



THE PARENT POWER! PROGRAM

*A Special Program for Parents who Have – or Need – Choices
A project of The Center for Education Reform*

Unleashing the power of ordinary parents on policymakers and the media

MISSION

The *Parent Power!* Program, is dedicated to creating effective, local parent advocates for education reform, in communities and state capitals. It is based on the simple premise that parents are the most forceful advocates for changes in education and that when it comes to demanding more and better opportunities, parents are education reform's biggest assets.

The *Parent Power!* Program provides parents with children in charter schools or on charter school waiting lists with a personalized, step-by-step program to allow them to be effective advocates for laws or other policies affecting choices for their children.

THE NEED

Parents are the best and biggest hope for charter school progress, for their defense and for their expansion. Many charter school leaders are unaware of the potential parents have to protect and improve their schools. But even the most savvy charter school parent in an urban area is not well versed or tied in closely to what makes her charter school a reality. There is little knowledge of the link between charter schools and the state capitals. With the advances of charter schools being compromised weekly by the establishment all across the states, it is time to unleash the energy of needy, but passionate parents on the public and policymakers. The Center for Education Reform's program galvanizes parents to be that needed force.



THE Center for Education Reform



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Center for Education Reform's *Parent Power!* Program is a unique, personalized program that is delivered in partnership with charter school leaders and their advocacy groups at the community and/or state level. Using accepted and successful strategies and grassroots leadership tactics, CER provides trained experts to deliver the program and engage parents in specific training. In addition, CER provides follow-up training to community or state leaders to ensure ongoing support and success.

Training and Materials

A specialized training program for parents has been created for those with children in charter schools or on charter waiting lists to help them understand the importance of their choices, how to protect and advance that choice, and how to be effective advocates for good education no matter what school their child attends.

An information handbook accompanies the training, which is presented in both English and Spanish. The *Parent Power!* handbook also includes a state or region specific resource guide of legislators, charter schools, media outlets and state or community based support.





Organizational Partnership

The hallmark of a successful program requires a partnership with the state association or other community-based organization in the region of the parent training. It is a proven fact that education reform happens at the state and local levels, and CER's job in this partnership is to help state and local partners develop their grassroots to ensure results and success long after CER's parent trainers have gone.

To ensure maximum success with the *Parent Power!* Program, CER requires that, in exchange for CER's services, the state or local organization becomes an official Partner and commits to work together according to the following:

- ◆ Partners need to identify and contact 3-5 charter school administrators and secure their participation with this effort to train their parents.
- ◆ CER and Partners must agree on time, place and venue, and all of the logistical aspects of the event up front. Partnering groups also need to commit to using *Parent Power!* outreach and promotional materials and to helping distribute them to schools and parents locally.
- ◆ No fewer than six weeks before a training session, Partners will have canvassed the targeted communities to ensure that training does not conflict with major or minor events.
- ◆ State or local organizations need to commit to making the training a priority for their group and make sure that their core staff members are present for all training sessions.
- ◆ Partnering groups will assign a staff member to participate in training and to work with CER to learn the material, enabling them to continue the training in other regions or cities.
- ◆ CER recognizes that its local contacts often know their states best, and will rely upon them to ensure that training is done in high-density areas that are most likely to attract hundreds of parents to one session.
- ◆ CER will provide staff to take notes to ensure that any common questions or concerns are answered and that appropriate follow up is recommended.
- ◆ CER will provide details about state and local lawmakers, newspapers, and best practices for parent contact.





Event Set up and Organization

While putting an event together is always time-consuming, CER's program provides a strong logistics toolkit that guarantees smooth events. If our Partners do not have staff to support the on-the-ground planning, CER can make available personnel to come in and organize the event.

The basics, that the state or local organization needs to handle, (and which CER supports) are as follows:

- ◆ Location. A centrally located, family-friendly venue for the event(s). This can be a church hall, a school auditorium or a community center. The location must have room to serve food and to have separate rooms for childcare. It also needs to be well equipped with audio and visual aides.
- ◆ Food. Events are planned around meals to entice families to attend and to make the training feel like a more social occasion. Partners need to purchase easy to serve food that can be delivered within an hour of being needed. Popular choices: fried chicken, salads, sandwiches, barbecue and pasta.
- ◆ Prizes for raffles. Raffles always draw attention. Bags of school supplies, gift certificates to the Gap or Target, bus tokens in big cities, etc are all great ideas. There must be at least 6 prizes/prize bags. Tickets for raffle prizes need to be provided.
- ◆ Child care. At least three adults or older teens per 20 children. We recommend that each person receive a stipend of about \$50.00 for the entire event.
- ◆ Translators. A translator and if possible, several translation head sets, which are normally available at city facilities or through libraries. (note: CER can supply a translator but oftentimes, schools like to participate and this gives them a way to do so)
- ◆ Movies and games. We recommend a few age-appropriate movies for different sets of children, plus crayons, paper and games.
- ◆ Volunteers. Preferably from the schools, for registration, food service and general assistance.
- ◆ T-Shirts. If you can get a business or community leader to sponsor T-Shirts, it will add a special flair to the event. All personnel working the event are asked to wear the same T-Shirt. Suggestions for what to say: *Parent Power!* with the name of the group and the name of the program.
- ◆ Registration Materials. CER will provide you with sign-up sheets to get the name, phone number, and other pertinent information for each attendee.



THE Center for Education Reform



The Invitation

The *Parent Power!* Program comes with a suggested invitation letter and method for distribution. Because parent lists are and should be guarded by each school, this program requires some work on the part of the participating schools. CER works with its partnering organizations to ensure that invitations are properly advanced.

- ◆ For parents of children in charter schools, we will contact designated school administrators to distribute the parent information session invitation to each parent, both via backpack with their kids as well as through snail mail, during parent meetings and through email. We also ask that Partners recommend several different "drops", especially a few days before the event.
- ◆ Either CER or other organizations must designate a person in their office to take RSVPs and to make follow-up phone calls to schools. Responses, while never scientific, are necessary because of food and child care logistics.
- ◆ For the parents of children on waiting lists, we ask that the school mail a separate letter to these parents, which explains the importance of helping to advocate for more choices for their children. Again, follow-up calls will be critical.

THE EVENT - WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS

It's the day of the event. Nearly 200 parents have said they would show up, and with them, about 40 children. You have 10 staff/volunteers ready to meet and greet. You have people assigned to register. You have people standing ready to take the children and a few minutes before the event, only a few people have shown up. Then, there's a swarm of people at the door.

CER trainers are standing ready to get people seated. It's 10 minutes after the hour, and it looks like chaos. (Chaos is good). The trainers start with an overview of why they are here, and move into the basics of a charter. The audience is queried about their knowledge base, and the formal training begins.

It usually goes on for about an hour and then there's a break for the meal. After 30 minutes, the parents are moved back into the training area and they spend another hour or so completing the program. At the end, raffles are drawn. Prizes are given out. Parents are thanked, and any that might be interested in continuing to help charters grow are invited to give their name and attend another meeting in the future. This is where your parent leaders are born. And the event is over.





EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Parents who did not know about the volatility of charters or even how to play a more definite role in their growth become energized. It can be expected that:

- ◆ A majority will contact their local and state lawmakers, making visits to district offices and building relationships.
- ◆ A small number, 10-15 parents, will emerge as leaders.
- ◆ Partner organizations will learn how smart their parents are and how much they instinctually understand politics.
- ◆ The association or local partner will want to create an official parents group to advance charters among parents regularly.
- ◆ Key lessons will be learned by all parties, especially for the on the ground organizers. Best practices in grassroots advocacy, plus ammunition for further training down the road, will be acquired.

Ongoing communication and work will also need to be done to secure a comfort level among parents and reinforce their connectivity to the effort. CER will remain available for continued effort and follow-up.

COSTS AND FEES

CER normally requires a modest contribution for its efforts to help support and expand its parent advocacy work. Partners are expected to cover costs associated with the event set-up as well as travel and lodging for CER leaders.

