



DISTRICT MATERIALS

These sample newsletter articles, letters to parents and other resources may be provided to districts in your state. NSBA will be providing an adaptation of this packet—and the key advocacy messages—to school board members who take part in the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE).

Sample Newsletter Copy

If electronic, add links to website section with research about school reform, school and district performance data, and communications toolkit or action plan.

Waiting for Superman misses opportunity, superintendent says

A recent call to action on behalf of public schools issued at the conclusion of Davis Guggenheim’s film, *Waiting for Superman*, is commendable, says Superintendent [insert name], noting that engaged parents and communities are an essential part of school and student success.

[Name] warns, however, that the documentary’s primary solution – more charter schools – ignores research about what really works in school and district reform. “What we really need is a call to action that ensures that every public school is successful,” says [name]. “Not everyone can win in a lottery, but everyone can win in a great public (or neighborhood) school.”

“Research shows that 83 percent of traditional public schools perform as well or better than charter schools, something the film fails to mention,” says [name,] who also expressed concern that the film unfairly contrasted the nation’s top charter schools with its worst public schools.

“It’s misleading to use a handful of outliers, on either end of the spectrum, to make sweeping judgments about school quality or to shape important public policy debates,” says [name].

While *Waiting for Superman* and NBC’s “Education Nation” say important things about the challenges faced by high-needs schools and students, the pro-charter, anti-teachers’ union message oversimplifies complicated issues, according to [name].

“The “us” versus “them” mentality promotes division rather than collaboration, and makes thoughtful discussions about education reform more difficult,” says [name].



The charter schools highlighted in the film and by NBC do offer inspiring lessons about how strong principals and committed teachers can transform children’s lives and futures, according to [name].

However, the promoters missed the opportunity to highlight how many traditional public schools are also achieving similar successes, [name] says.

Like the schools depicted, [xyz School District] also has students and families facing enormous obstacles, says [name]. [Describe research-backed strategies the local district is using to meet the needs of these students]

“While there are struggling public schools, there are also successful public schools like [insert local example or examples] across the country that are helping children from all backgrounds reach great academic heights,” says [name].

Sample Letter To Parents And The Community

Recommend joint submission by Board chairperson and Superintendent; if appropriate, have PTA Council president and head of teacher association or union co-sign as well.

Consider posting the letter as the banner story on your district website and emailing it to parents and business/community leaders

An Open Letter to Our Community

The recent call to action on behalf of our public schools made by Davis Guggenheim’s documentary film, *Waiting For Superman*, NBC’s *Education Nation*, the Fordham Foundation’s report on cities ripe for reform, among others, is commendable.

These efforts say important things about the challenges faced by our public schools and the students we serve. We also agree that community involvement in education reform is crucial to its success.

However, the messaging associated with these projects – “charters are good” and “teacher unions are bad” – oversimplifies complicated issues and threatens to thwart thoughtful discussions about education reform. The “us” versus “them” mentality promotes division rather than collaboration, which few would dispute is necessary for true and lasting change to occur.

We also shouldn’t use a handful of outliers to make sweeping claims about policy. While the charter schools highlighted offer inspiring lessons about how strong principals and committed



teachers can transform children’s lives and futures, research shows that 83 percent of traditional public schools perform as well or better than charter schools.

It’s also unfair and misleading to use the worst public schools as typical examples of public schooling nationwide. While there are struggling public schools, there are also successful public schools and teachers across the country that are helping children from all backgrounds reach great academic heights.

[Insert information about how your local schools are performing; use international comparisons if available to illustrate global competitiveness]

Unfortunately, these recent multimedia events did not feature schools like *[insert names of high-performing schools or schools beating similar odds as in the film.]* We can’t let this missed opportunity and the experiences of the bottom 5 percent of schools dictate what we say and do about the rest.

We also can’t ignore what research tells us works in transforming our schools. Despite the hype, what’s required is clear: visionary superintendents, strong principals, committed and highly skilled teachers, engaging curricula that appeals to diverse learning styles, involved parents, an engaged community, and effective school boards focused on meeting local student needs.

Charter schools don’t have a lock on innovation. In *[insert information on state or local public school innovations and success; use data to illustrate key points.]*

What we really need is a call to action that ensures that every public school is successful. We must develop a system where all kids can be winners. Not everyone can win in a lottery, or meet the admissions criteria used by private or parochial schools, but everyone can win in a public school.

Given that 90 percent of American students attend traditional public schools, change in a single classroom, school or even one district is not enough. We need replicable, scalable, effective ways to provide all children the education that they need.

No solution is as scalable, accessible, or accountable as a great public school. [Add in how concerned employees, parents and community members can join in your efforts. See examples below.]

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[If you want to join our effort to ensure great public schools for every child, contact our volunteers and partnership office at {insert phone number or email address}. We need caring, competent adults willing to serve as reading and lunch buddies, academic tutors, office support, crossing guards, and more.]



[Find out more about what the research says about improving our schools, sign-up for one of our Great Public Schools study groups at {insert website address or link to online sign-up form.}]

[If you want to make sure that every public school in our community has the resources it needs to help students succeed, donate to {insert school or district foundation and/or link to Adopt-A-Classroom, Donor's Choose or other website. If you use Adopt-a-Classroom or Donor's Choose, make sure to encourage teachers to register their classrooms as well.}]

[Want to see *Waiting for Superman*? Join our school board, superintendent, principals, teachers and support staff on {insert date, time, movie theater location, and price}. Then, join us for small group discussions on what's working, what's not in our public schools at {insert school name] school cafeteria. To find out more about what the research says about improving public schools, go to [insert link to special section on website devoted to school reform research and district plans/efforts.]

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Sample email or letter to employees

Recommend joint submission by Board chairperson and Superintendent; if appropriate, have PTA Council president and head of teacher association or union co-sign as well. Distribute to employees first.

Consider posting the letter on your district Intranet (if viewed by employees only) and insert link to text in employee print or electronic newsletter.

Dear Employees:

The recent call to action on behalf of our nation's public schools made by Davis Guggenheim's documentary film, *Waiting for Superman*, NBC's *Education Nation*, the Fordham Foundation's report on cities ripe for reform, among others, is commendable.

These efforts say important things about the challenges faced by our schools and the students we serve. We also agree that community involvement in education reform is crucial to its success.

However, the film's messaging – “charters are good” and “teacher unions are bad” – oversimplifies complicated issues and threatens to thwart thoughtful discussions about education reform. The “us” versus “them” mentality promotes division rather than collaboration, which few would dispute is necessary for true and lasting change to occur.



We also shouldn't use a handful of outliers to make sweeping claims about policy. While the charter schools highlighted offer inspiring lessons about how strong principals and committed teachers can transform children's lives and futures, research shows that 83 percent of traditional public schools perform as well or better than charter schools.

It's also unfair and misleading to use these schools as typical examples of public schooling nationwide. While there are struggling public schools, there are also successful public schools and teachers across the country helping children from all backgrounds reach great academic heights.

We have many of them right here, including *[Insert information about how your local schools are performing; use international comparisons if available to illustrate global competitiveness]*

Like the schools depicted, we also have students and families facing enormous obstacles – challenges that our teachers, support staff, principals and district administrators are working hard, every day, to overcome.

Unfortunately, these recent multimedia events did not feature schools like *[insert names of high-performing schools or schools beating similar odds as in the film.]* We can't let this missed opportunity and the experiences of the bottom 5 percent of schools dictate what we say and do about the rest.

We also can't ignore what research tells us works in transforming our schools. Despite the hype, what's required is clear: visionary superintendents, strong principals, committed and highly skilled teachers, engaging curricula that appeals to diverse learning styles, involved parents, an engaged community, and effective school boards focused on meeting local student needs.

Charter schools don't have a lock on innovation. In *[insert information on state or local public school innovations and success; use data to illustrate key points.]*

What we really need is a call to action that ensures that every public school is successful. We must develop a system where all kids can be winners. Not everyone can win in a lottery, or meet the admissions criteria used by private or parochial schools, but everyone can win in a public school.

Given that 90 percent of American students attend traditional public schools, change in a single classroom, school or even one district is not enough. We need replicable, scalable, effective ways to provide all children the education that they need.

That's why we're *[insert information about your local school or district goals for this year and strategic plan/reform efforts.]*



No solution is as scalable, accessible, or accountable as a great public school. And no one works harder than our public school employees.

Thank you for everything you do for our students, our schools and our community. If you'd like to help set the record straight about what is really going on in our public schools, or, to find out more about what we're doing to improve our schools and how you can be a part of it, go to [insert link] or click here.

Sincerely,

Name
Title

Name
Title

Name
Title

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Title

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