

WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Most newspapers state their policies for submitting letters to the editor (LTE) in the paper (usually on the opinion page). Make sure you follow their procedures exactly. You can find information on your local paper on the internet. It is also good to submit your LTE to more than one paper in the area.

Follow up with the editor of the letters page to be sure he/she received your letter, that it meets their requirements and to ask when they are planning to print it. Make sure you have a strategy for who signs the letter, whether it should be your group, other groups, local officials, or an average citizen. Be mindful of who sends it out; the person signing the letter should be the person who sends it. It is also effective to send in letters from several people on the same issue. This increases the chance that the paper will print one of them.

WRITING TIPS

- **Respond.** Respond to stories. Letters in response to stories that ran recently are more likely to be printed. Read the paper and watch for stories that relate to your issue.
- **Find a hook.** As with Op-Eds, you've got to hook the reader and the editor right away. Use an interesting anecdote or question, a provocative statement or a colorful quote.
- **Make it accessible.** Don't just give facts or figures. Connect Early Care and Education to things people care about, i.e. caring for their family, moral imperative, etc. Once you have established this, back it up facts as a means of supporting these statements.
- **Back up your assertions with facts.** And double check them. Make sure your quotations are accurate both the actual words and context in which they are used. But again, don't lead with them. They should be supplementary, because otherwise readers will be skeptical and inattentive.
- **Show emotion.** With LTE's it is fine to express feelings of anger or of frustration but make sure you avoid overstatement. The more you sound like a person instead of a press release, the better.
- **Keep it short.** Short letters are more likely to be printed. State the problem/topic (why you personally are concerned). Describe the problem in a way that makes it more real for the reader. Keep this part short; we don't want to dwell on the problem as much as try to suggest solutions. State the solution, both generally and specifically. Summary: Wrap it up with the final why again, the more personal the better. A single, well-written sentence wins your audience.

SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

In recent years, there has been a great deal of talk about accountability in education for kids, teachers and schools. We have raised the bar for what students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level. In fact, many skills that were once taught in first grade are now introduced in kindergarten. This increased demand on students makes the early years of a child's life even more imperative.

Quality Head Start programs are a good investment for both individual students and families, but also for our communities. Children and families who attend show increased academic achievement, lower grade retention rates, improved attendance and better social skills. In addition, these programs reduce the likelihood that a student will drop out of school or become involved in criminal activity, and increase their overall physical and emotional health throughout their lifetimes. The potential benefits for both individuals and taxpayers are considerable.

Every student deserves to start school ready to succeed, and access to quality early learning program is one of the best ways we can ensure it happens. I respectfully ask lawmakers and citizens to support Head Start.

Head Start Crucial for Kids

Dear Editor:

Based on the latest information by the Census Bureau, the poverty rate for children in 2008 was 19 percent and is estimated to rise to 25 percent for 2009. With so many children in poverty, it is crucial for programs like Head Start to be available to serve these families and children who are most at risk.

Head Start provides comprehensive education, social and emotional development, and parent involvement to enhance the lives of families. Head Start provides parents with access to available resources and provides their children with a preschool program that prepares them for kindergarten and ongoing school success.

Head Start is more than a day care program; to me, Head Start has become a part of my family and provided my children with continuity that, at times, I was unable to offer them. Head Start funding needs to be sustained or increased to ensure that these quality services can continue to be provided to families.