



2015 DSC National Week of Action Media Organizing Packet

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Goals for the 2015 Week of Action (WOA)

- More recognition of School Pushout issue
- Engage 100 organizations to participate in 2015 WoA
- Support kick off of larger campaigns of DSC member organizations
- Help build new relationships and recruit 5 new members for DSC
- Highlight mass incarceration issue
- Highlight suspensions of young students (Too Young to Suspend)
- Highlight new data from Are We Closing the Discipline Gap Report (Dan Losen Report)

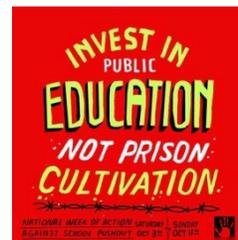
1. Social Media Strategy and Daily Schedule

Five Simple Steps to Get Involved!

The DSC invites you to participate in the Week of Action by taking some very simple steps to harness the people power of social media.

1. *Change your Facebook and Twitter profile photos.*

- We will be using the “Invest in Public Education Not Prison Cultivation” image as our Twitter and Facebook avatars before and during this year’s week of action, and we hope you choose to do the same.
- We’ve created a “Twibbon,” which is a tool that will easily let you replace your profile photo on Twitter and Facebook with our image. Just click on this link, and follow the instructions. <http://bit.ly/1MGX1XR>
- The Twibbon also provides a way for you to let your friends know why you’ve changed your profile picture, and to encourage them to do so too. Make sure you click on the share buttons after you change your photo.
- If you prefer to change your profile pictures manually, you can download the image here: <http://bit.ly/1LfSrhp>



2. *Sign-Up for our Twitter Thunderclap set for October 8th*

Follow this link <http://thndr.it/1KSQBT6> to join DSC Oct 8 to send tweets demanding federal accountability in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act! Sign-up at the link <http://thndr.it/1KSQBT6> and send this sample tweet to encourage others to join:

- Sign up to support equal ED opportunities for ALL students! On Oct. 8 Push Back to #EndSchoolPushout! #DSCWoA2015 thndr.it/1KSQBT6

3. *Commit to tweeting one or more messages daily during the Week of Action 2015 using the hashtag*

#DSCWoA2015

This will help us measure our campaign effectiveness, and will also allow you an easy way to see everyone’s **Twitter** activity during the week, which in turn will make it easy for you to retweet relevant messages. We also suggest using additional hashtags during the daily schedule outlined on the next page.

4. *Join our National Live Stream Event and Twitter Chat*

DSC is co-sponsoring two events with the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans during the Week of Action:

- Oct 6th National Event – Fund Public Schools, Not Prisons at 12pm est
Stay tuned for links to the live stream and tweet as youth and parent leaders from DSC are joined by the White House Initiative, members of Congress and guests!
- Oct 7th Twitter Chat from 12-1pm est - Join DSC and the White House Initiative for a #RethinkDiscipline chat.

5. *Use our Daily Twitter Schedule to Promote Our National Demands*

Every two to three days of the week, DSC will promote a different one of our national demands with messages, statistics, local events and photos that you can tweet and post. The schedule is:

October 3-4 #EducateDontIncarcerate

Demand 1: Shift funding from school police to counselors and positive discipline.

- This week we join 100s of advocates to say #EducateDontIncarcerate w/ @DignityinSchool Week of Action #DSCWoA2015 bit.ly/1CZ6d1G
- Schools need more counselors, not police officers #EducateDontIncarcerate #DSCWoA2015
- Students need educational supports, not handcuffs. Invest in positive interventions #EducateDontIncarcerate #DSCWoA2015

October 5-7 #RethinkDiscipline

Demand 2: Use positive interventions instead of suspensions, expulsions or arrests and end racial disparities in discipline.

- It's time to #EndSchoolPushout and invest in #RestorativeJustice & #PBIS to create positive school climate #RethinkDiscipline #DSCWoA2015
- Discipline disparities esp. affect youth of color, LGBTQ students & those with disabilities #RethinkDiscipline #DSCWoA2015

October 6 National Event

- TODAY: Special #DSCWoA2015 event to #EndSchoolPushout with @DignityinSchool @HRC @NAACP_LDF @nwlc @AfAmEducation [insert livestream link]
- We are proud to have the @WhiteHouse @AfAmEducation to discuss creating positive school climate & #RethinkDiscipline #DSCWoA2015
- We need discipline reform NOW because ALL youth deserve an education that will help them succeed #DSCWoA2015 #RethinkDiscipline

October 8-9 #InvestinPublicEd

Demand 3: Fully implement positive alternatives such as PBIS and Restorative Practices.

- Support equal ED opportunities for ALL students! Sign up before 12pm et Oct 8, Push Back to #EndSchoolPushout #DSCWoA2015 thndr.it/1KSQBT6
- Are there #schooldiscipline alternatives to suspensions, expulsions & arrests? YES! #PBIS & #restorativejustice works #InvestinPublicEd
- Fed guidance says school climate should be "safe, supportive, & conducive to teaching & learning" #InvestinPublicEd 1.usa.gov/1gDTBIO

October 10-11 #ParentPower/#YouthPower to #EndSchoolPushout

Demand 4: Engage students and parents in decision-making about discipline policies.

- Youth across the country this week are urging communities to say #EndSchoolPushout! #YouthPower #DSCWoA2015 bit.ly/1CZ6d1G
- Parent & youth voices must be considered when developing #schooldiscipline policies. #ParentPower #YouthPower #DSCWoA2015

Important links to Share/Promote

- **DSC Week of Action Promo Video** <http://bit.ly/1iODiZJ>
- **DSC Week of Action Information and Events Calendar** <http://bit.ly/1CZ6d1G>
- **Solutions Not Suspensions initiative** <http://bit.ly/OaIG6K>
- **DSC Model Code** <http://bit.ly/RodcNi>

2. Tips for Using Twitter, Facebook and More

Suggestions for using Twitter

- Tweets are only 140 characters long so make sure to shorten links; you can do so for free here: <http://bitly.com>. If you create an account with *Bitly* you can keep track of your short links and see how many people visit your link.
- Keep track of trending hashtags related to education, human rights, social justice and include them in your posts when you can do so naturally.



Sample Tweets

- ***Promote the Week of Action Promo Video***
 - Watch #YouthPower & #ParentPower push back to #EndSchoolPushout <http://bit.ly/1iODiZJ> Join the #DSCWoA2015
- ***Announce Local or National Events***
 - Today in [YOUR LOCATION] we demand #EndSchoolPushout & #InvestinPublicEd Not Prisons! Join Us [INSERT SHORT LINK FOR MORE INFO ON YOUR LOCAL EVENT] #DSCWoA2015
- ***To share recent education news/content about school pushout, zero tolerance, and issues that relate to your local work and the Week of Action***
 - Thanks @[YOUR LOCAL EDUCATION REPORTER] for your coverage on our work to #EndSchoolPushout & #InvestinPublicEd – [INSERT SHORT LINK]
 - Check out our latest [LOCAL EVENT/STATEMENT] to #EndSchoolPushout & #RethinkDiscipline –[INSERT SHORT LINK] @[YOUR LOCAL EDUCATION REPORTER]
- ***To Make a Statement***

→ We can #EndSchoolPushout with #ParentPower & #RestorativeJustice! (insert link here) #DSCWoA2015

- **To direct a message to a person/legislator/reporter**

→ To #EndSchoolPushout [@Obama] we want you to #InvestinPublicEd (insert link here) #DSCWoA2015

- **Live real-time updates from your Event**

→ Marching to #CityHall to demand #EducateDontIncarcerate to #EndSchoolPushout! (insert link here) for #DSCWoA2015

Suggestions for using Facebook

- **Facebook doesn't have a limit on the number of characters** like Twitter does, so you can say more in your posts, and you don't have to worry about shortening your links (but still keep it short and to the point!)



- **You can tag individuals and organizations** that have a Facebook account—that way that they are directly notified when you post

- **Post/Share DSC Week of Action Page with promotional video:**
<http://www.dignityinschools.org/our-work/week-of-action>

- **Create a Facebook event for your local event.**

→ Check the option to allow anyone to post to the event wall. Once you've created the event, switch back to using Facebook from your personal account, and join the event. You will then be able to invite your friends. Once people join the event, it will show up as a reminder on their Facebook homepage, similar to how birthdays show up. More instructions are here:
<http://www.facebook.com/help/events/create>

→ You can also create a Facebook event asking people to Tweet the same message at a certain date and time. Provide details in the event description.

- **Live post from your event with updates** on where you are, how things are going, whether cars are honking, people are applauding and expressing their solidarity. This

can help you later if you want to remember how it went, what you did and/or if you need to write a blog post after your event. It's a great way to keep your Facebook friends and allies informed as well. It doesn't hurt either in cases where you may run into trouble with police during a march/rally/protest.

Sample Facebook Posts

- Did you know that on average states spend \$5.7 Billion a Year on the Juvenile Justice System Instead of our Schools? Join us for the National Week of Action to #EndSchoolPushout and demand #InvestinPublicEd
<http://www.dignityinschools.org/our-work/week-of-action>
- Join us for the 2015 Week of Action to #EndSchoolPushout and #RethinkDiscipline through #RestorativeJustice. Please watch, embed and share this promotional video:
- Youth in [INSERT YOUR CITY] are marching to City Hall to demand that our school district invest in counselors, teacher training and positive discipline alternatives like Restorative Justice instead of metal detectors, armed guards and other policies that push young people out of school! – [INSERT LINK TO VIDEO/PHOTO/NEWS COVERAGE OF YOUR LOCAL EVENT]

Suggestions for using Instagram

- Follow DSC on Instagram at @Dignityinschool. We will follow you back and repost all pictures that you take related to your work and the Week of Action.

- Write a photo caption and be as descriptive as possible in it. Using keywords is a great way to gain likes for your photo or video (similar to Facebook) and gain new followers (similar to Twitter).

- Use hashtags and lots of them. It is not uncommon to see an Instagram photo caption made entirely of hashtags as they are used to call attention to photos and videos. In addition to using DSC's hashtags on photos and videos, add popular Instagram hashtags like: #instagood, #photooftheday, #bestoftheday, #instadaily and ***our Daily National Demand Hashtags:***



Instagram

#DSCWoA2015, #EducateDontIncarcerate, #RethinkDiscipline, #InvestinPublicEd, #EndSchoolPushout

- Capture photos and videos during your events and post them to Instagram. People want to know how your event is going and this is a great way to engage them visually. And if you link your Instagram to your Facebook and Twitter, the videos and photos will instantly post to all 3 sites.

Sample Instagram Posts

- Instagram Video: Watch #YouthPower & #ParentPower Push Back to #EndSchoolPushout during #DSCWoA2015!
- Instagram Photo: #Look [INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME] is Pushing Back to #EndSchoolPushout! We're calling for #InvestinPublicEd, #RestorativeJustice and better #EducateDontIncarcerate
- Instagram Photo or Video: [NAME PARTICIPANTS] in #[NAME CITY] are standing up for #YouthPower and #InvestinPublicEd!

Other Social Media Platforms

You can also check out other social media platforms, including:

- SnapChat - a video messaging app you can use to take photos, record videos, add text and drawings to share with friends that are available for 1-10 seconds. Visit <https://support.snapchat.com/ca/howto>
 - o Follow DSC on Snapchat @DignityinSchool
- Periscope – an app that allows you to live stream video from your phone. Visit <https://medium.com/@periscope>
- Vine Videos – a social networking app that allows you to create 7 second videos to share with friends and followers. Visit <https://vine.co/>

3. How To Earn Good Media Coverage

1. **Build Your Media List**

- Create a list of the names, e-mail addresses, phone and fax numbers for media outlets and reporters in your area who cover education and other issues related to school discipline. Keep in mind that contact information and the reporters assigned to cover particular topics change, so you'll need to update your media contact list frequently.
- Check in with allies and friends and ask them if they're willing to share a specific contact in the media or their media contact lists.
- If you already have existing relationships with journalists in your area, make sure to get in touch with them, and if they're not covering education, ask them who the right contact is.



2. **Use the Internet**

- Create a news alert on Google. Search for education-related articles and keep track of the authors/journalists. You can search terms like “school to prison pipeline” or “school suspensions” for example at - <http://www.google.com/alerts>
- Sparkaction is a great place to start finding and contacting national and local media- <http://sparkaction.org/act/media>
- To find your local Associated Press bureau go to : <http://www.ap.org/states> and add a /YourState to the URL, for example: <http://www.ap.org/states/mississippi>
- Post your news advisory or press release in your local Indymedia site. You can find a listing of all existing regional Indymedia websites in the U.S. here - <http://indymedia.us/en/index.shtml>
- Submit your news advisory or press release as a plain text e-mail (not an attachment) to Common Dreams (www.commondreams.org) by e-mailing it to: newswire@commondreams.org

- You can also submit your news advisory or press release to Radio Locator, which lists all US radio stations by zip code - <http://www.radio-locator.com/>
- To locate a Community/Public Access TV station, visit The Global Village website at - <http://www.communitymedia.se/cat/linksus.htm>

3. **Send out a Media Advisory**

- Send out a media advisory about your event twice – approximately one week in advance of the event and then 24 hours before as a reminder. The media advisory should be in the body of the email. It should not be sent as an attachment, which is more likely to end up in media spam filters. (See below for a sample media advisory and tips on writing an effective advisory.)

4. **Contact Reporters**

- **Follow-up after you've sent the advisory.** Make a pitch call to let the reporter know why it's important that they cover your event. This call is the most important part of earning media coverage.

- **Call reporters on the day of the event.** Give them a quick update (mention how many people you're expecting) and then pitch them on coming again. Make sure they still have your advisory and re-send it if they don't.

- If you are having trouble getting a response from a reporter through calls or emails, **try tweeting at them about the event.** Growing numbers of reporters prefer Twitter to other forms of communication.

- **Prepare a media packet to give to reporters who come to your event. It should include:**

- A one-page sheet of information about your organization.
- A copy of your local media advisory with your organization's letterhead
- A copy of the DSC National Week of Action Press Release
- Printouts of local/national past media coverage of your organization or campaign.
- A list of possible contacts for interviews (local and national) with their names, affiliation, short bios, phone number and e-mail address

- **Look for reporters at your event:**

- Greet them and answer any questions they have.
- If they have cameras, help them get the shots they're looking for.

- If you have any good volunteers with powerful stories, introduce them to reporters.

• Follow-up

- If media was present at your event, it's a great idea to follow up with them and send any photos or other information from the event. You can ask them if they need any other information to write their story and if they have any sense of when the piece will run.



- If media wasn't present, give target reporters a call to let them know how it went, and send in or drop off photos and a summary of the outcome of the event.

4. Media Advisory

Media Advisories are one-page announcements of an upcoming event. They are not designed for the public, but for journalists. Their purpose is to inform reporters of upcoming events, and convince them that these events are genuine news stories that are worthy of coverage.

Unlike a traditional press release, your media advisory should provide basic information about the event, such as: “who”, “what”, “when”, “where” and “why”.

Tips/Hints

- Use a catchy title that best describes your event/action and is more likely to get media attention.
- Include the most important information in the headline. You can include a short subhead.
- Give a brief description of the event and the issue, focusing on what makes it timely and newsworthy for reporters in your area.
- Make it local! Localize the media advisory for your city, using data/facts that are relevant to your area.
- Find good local spokespeople or prominent members of your community to quote in the advisory.

- Include social media information, such as the hashtag you'll be using, so reporters can stay up-to-date via Twitter.

Please see sample media advisory below and modify the title and content to fit your local event.

Sample Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Month/Day/Year

Contact: Name, Phone, Fax, E-mail

[City] Youth, Parents and Teachers Join National Week of Action to End Harsh Discipline Practices that Push Students Out of [State] Schools

[Your Organization]'s Event is Part of Coordinated Efforts around the Country to "Invest in Public Education, Not Prison Cultivation"

WHAT: [Name/Description of your event or action] – part of the Dignity in Schools Campaign National Week of Action Against School Pushout

WHEN: [Day, Month, and times of your local event.]

WHERE: [Address for Event Location]

WHO: Parents, youth, educators and advocates. Featured guests/speakers will be... [include names, affiliation/organization].

[City, State] – On [Day, Month/Date], members of [organization name and description (for example: a youth- led community organization)] are bringing their voices to the 6th Annual National Week of Action Against School Pushout by [activity description]. The event will be held at [location and time.]

[Name of Organization] will join communities in more than 50 cities across the county to demand that our school systems adopt positive approaches to addressing behavior instead of relying on zero tolerance discipline policies, school police and other punitive practices that push young people out of school. In our city [add a sentence to two of local data on suspensions/expulsions; racial disparities; or other relevant local issues.]

The Week of Action, which will take place from October 3 to October 11, is coordinated by the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC), a national coalition of 98 organizations led

by youth, parents, educators, civil rights leaders and social justice advocates that promotes alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline policies. Such policies have been found to result in much higher suspension and expulsion rates and referrals to law enforcement, often for minor misbehavior, fueling a “school-to-prison” pipeline.

During the Week of Action, DSC member organizations will hold rallies, marches, forums and trainings calling on states and school districts to shift funding from hiring school police to hiring more counselors and implementing positive discipline practices that build healthy relationships and treat discipline as a teaching moment. [Your organization], along with other DSC members, will also be calling on school districts to address disparities in punishment and referrals of students to the criminal justice system, which disproportionately affect low-income youth, youth of color, LGBTQ students, and those with disabilities.

###

[Include a short description of your organization/group.]

5. The Press Release

A press release is usually no more than two-pages and should read like a news article, complete with quotes and statements of fact.

Recommendation: Send out your press release on the morning of, during or shortly after your event to make a statement and provide information about your event to media who did not attend but may want to cover it. Make sure to tell what happened, who spoke, how many people attended, if there were any actions, etc.

Elements

For Immediate Release - Should always appear in the upper left-hand margin

Contact - Always list the name, title, telephone and cell phone numbers, and email address of your contact or spokesperson.

Headline - Make sure to use a bold-type face. Make it catchy; your title is what will (or will not) get people’s attention.

Dateline - Date and City, State where the release is being issued from.

Lead Paragraph - The first paragraph should grab the reader’s attention and should contain the relevant information of your message (the who, what, when, where, why).

Text - The main body, where your message develops. Include quotes from a potential interviewee, spokesperson, advocate, etc. when possible.

Recap - Restate the main point of the release or include relevant additional information.

Finishing - Always conclude a press release with “###”, it indicates the end of the document. If your press release is more than one page long, type in “-More-“, at the bottom of the first page to indicate that it continues on a second page. Ideally, a press release should not be longer than 1-2 pages.

Tips

- Reporters sort through hundreds of releases a day, so write yours well, make it interesting and don’t forget to include all the salient information.

- Press releases are not a time to get funky with creative formatting; stick with the standard format to be sure that yours gets read.

- Start by defining your frame and writing down the three most important points you would want covered in a news story.



- Lead with the news – this could include new data or other information that is likely to be most interesting to reporters.

- Use an unbiased, third-person voice. If you think that the phrase “organizers say” waters down your point, write a direct quote.

Please see sample press release below and modify the title and content to fit your local event.

Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Month] [Date], [Year]

Contact: Name, Organization, Phone: (***) ***-****, Email: youremail@youremail.org

[Your State/City] Should Invest in School Discipline Practices that Help Students Succeed, Not Policies that Criminalize Youth

[City, State] Youth, Parents and Educators Take Part in National Week of Action to End School “Pushout”

[City, State] – Parents, teachers, students and other members of [your organization] held [or hosted] a/an [describe your event] today to focus more attention on the need to replace zero-tolerance discipline policies with approaches that build positive school climates and keep students in the classroom.

The event was part of the 6th Annual National Week of Action Against School Pushout (October 3-11), coordinated by the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC), a national coalition of 98 organizations led by youth, parents, educators, civil rights leaders and social justice advocates that promotes alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline policies. Such policies have been found to result in much higher suspension and expulsion rates and referrals to law enforcement, often for minor misbehavior, fueling a “school-to-prison” pipeline.

Thousands are gathering in cities across the country this week to call on policymakers and school district leaders to “Invest in Public Education not Prison Cultivation” and end the nation’s school “pushout” crisis. The Week of Action will include a major event in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 6th sponsored by DSC, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund Inc., the National Women's Law Center and the Human Rights Campaign.

“[Insert local quote]” said [Name of a Student, Parent or Organizer], of [City] and a member of the Dignity in Schools Campaign.

[Include a paragraph or two on the context/situation in your local schools, your organization’s work and your goals. If this goes out following your event you can also include specific information from the event, such as approximate numbers in attendance and speaker quotes.]

[Name of Organization] joined DSC member organizations and allies in over 50 cities around the country to demand school policies that adopt positive approaches to discipline, instead of relying on suspensions and expulsions to address misbehavior. These alternative discipline approaches, including Restorative Justice and Positive Behavior Intervention (PBIS) and Supports, focus on building healthy relationships

between teachers and students and treating discipline as a teaching moment rather than an opportunity to punish and push kids out of school. Additionally, the organizations called for a shift in funding priorities from hiring school police to hiring more counselors and training school personnel in positive discipline approaches. Such approaches have been found to significantly improve behavior and decrease suspensions and expulsions.

“[Insert local quote] said [name of person quoted above or another member of your organization].

###

[Include a short description of your organization/group.]

6. Sample Media Pitch-Call Script

A pitch-call should be no longer than 20-30 seconds, whether making the pitch in person or leaving a voicemail.

- Hello, may I speak with someone who covers education? (if necessary) OR (if talking to the right reporter:
- Good (Morning, Afternoon or Evening), My name is and I'm calling on behalf of [your organization] to inform you that we will be holding [describe your event] on [Day, Month] at [Location/s].
- This event will be held as part of the Dignity in Schools Campaign's Annual National Week of Action Against School Pushout, which will take place during the week of October 3rd to 11th. This is a national coordinated effort to bring attention to the school pushout crisis in our nation. Schools are using harsh discipline practices, like suspension, expulsion and referrals to law enforcement, often for minor misbehavior, that are pushing students out of school and into a pipeline to prison.
- We are calling on [you local policy-maker/city/state] to Invest in Public Education, Not Prison Cultivation.
- Here in [city], [share example of local statistic or story of pushout]



- We hope you are able to cover this important community event and have sent you a news advisory. Did you receive it? (If they say “no”, ask them for an e-mail address or fax number that you should send it to).
- Please feel free to contact me at [Number] if you have any questions.
- Thank you.

General Tips

- If the reporter is on deadline, offer to call back.
- If they ask for more details about your event, make sure to say how many people will be participating, mention if any prominent members of your community or public personalities (legislators, religious leaders, organizers) will be taking part or speaking at your event. Tie-in your event to an important date, another recent local event or occurrence, etc.
- Have the details of the event and information for local contacts available in case the reporter has questions.
- If the reporter has questions that you can't answer immediately, tell them you will send it by email so that they don't have to wait for you to find it.

7. Tips on Talking to the Media

- Talk to the reporter or editor-- don't settle for leaving voicemails or messages with the receptionist. Your pitch calls are your best weapon-- make sure you're using them.
- Be relentless with media. Call from the event if they don't show. This works particularly well with TV. Don't be afraid to call them back again if they didn't show to a previous event.
- Keep a great media list. Make sure you have all the emails and phone numbers, update it to show who comes, and what angles they like to cover (i.e. likes politics or likes local stories)

- Build relationships. Reporters are people too. If they know and trust you, they're more likely to come. Refer to stories they've done recently. Ask them if they have a minute. Call after the event and tell them how it went.

Talking with Reporters

- Always bring the message back -- no matter what question is asked. Phrases like, "what's really important here is XXX" or "I'm not sure about that, but what really matters today is XX." You're there to deliver a message, not answer questions.
- Remember that you're always on the record.
- If on television or radio (not live) -- ask for do-overs. Just stop in the middle of your quote and say, "I'm going to say that again".



Frame Your Message:

Clear and Compelling: Tell your story in a way that excites and engages people. You want people to want to become a part of the story. Do this by talking about:

- the problem,
- your solution to the problem, and
- actions that can be taken to solve the problem.

Concise: Reporters don't have a lot of time. The general public does not have a lot of time. Make sure your message is simple, jargon-free, and can be said in 15-30 seconds.

Consistent: When advertisers sell their product, they know that people need to hear or see their message at least nine times before it sinks in. Saying something once is never enough.

Control the Message Frame: When talking about your campaign, you need to make sure that you are staying within the basic framework of your concise and compelling message. Make sure you respond to questions with "what we want to talk about is..." or "we're here today because..." and not necessarily switch to their frame and answer their question. This is known as framing the debate or controlling the issue.

8. The Letter to the Editor

What is a Letter to the Editor?

Letters to the editor (LTE's) most often discuss a recent event or issue covered by a publication, radio station, or TV program. Widely read, LTE's are your chance to "sound-off" to your community about issues in the news.

Elements / Hints

- It is much easier to publish a letter to the editor than it is to place an op-ed
- Your letter has the best chance of being published if it is a reaction to a story in the paper. Respond as quickly as you can.
- Read the letters page: You will learn how to develop an effective letter-writing style, and you will see if someone has already responded with your idea.
- Keep it short and concise: 150-200 words. The paper will shorten your letter to suit its format; the more it has to cut, the less control you have over what gets printed. Lead and end your letter with the point you want to make.
- Focus on one main point.
- Write in short paragraphs, with no more than three sentences per paragraph.
- Don't write too often. Once every three months is about as often as you should.
- Avoid personal attacks.
- Put your full name and organization at the bottom, and include a phone number for verification purposes.
- Follow up to see if the letter was received.

Strategy for Submitting LTE's for DSC Week of Action

Before and During the Week of Action:

- Once you have the date and location for your local Week of Action event, look through the newspapers or news websites from your city or town for stories related to education and school discipline.
- Draft a letter relating the topic of the article to school pushout and your upcoming event (see sample on next page).
- Try to send your letter within 1-3 days after the story first appeared.

After your Week of Action event:

- If your event is covered by any newspapers or on-line news sources, have an ally, parent, youth, teacher or community member that you work with send in a letter

– for example, they could link a personal experience they have had with suspension or pushout to the article, or share an example of a positive alternative being used in their school.

Please see sample letter to the editor below and modify the title and content to fit your local event.

Sample Letter to the Editor

[Please modify as you see fit and make sure you stick to the messaging for your organization and the National Week of Action]

Dear Editor:

[Intro sentence connecting your letter to a recent article that appeared on education, dropout, school discipline, juvenile justice, etc.].

Our young people are experiencing a “pushout crisis” in schools. Unwelcoming school environments, underfunded schools, zero-tolerance discipline policies, and an emphasis on high stakes tests are pushing young people out of school and into prison and low wage jobs.

On average states spend \$5.7 billion a year on the juvenile justice system instead of our schools. Something is clearly wrong with this picture. This is why I will join thousands across the country from October 3-11 in the Dignity in Schools Campaign National Week of Action Against School Pushout. Here in [insert name of city or town], community members will gather at [location/address, date and time] for a [description/name of event] to raise awareness of the [describe the local policy or practices you are trying to change].

Schools across the nation are creating safe and caring school communities that protect students’ human right to education and dignity using strategies like restorative practices, mediation, and positive behavior supports that treat discipline as a teaching moment rather than an opportunity to punish students with suspension or expulsion.

Sincerely,

[your name, address and contact info]

The Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC) is a coalition of youth, parents, educators, civil rights organizations, and social justice advocates working to ensure the human right of every child to a quality education and to be treated with dignity. To learn more about the National Week of Action on School Pushout please visit - www.dignityinschools.org