

# The Everyday Advocacy Guide

*for Tennessee Charter School Leaders*

**Tips on how to advocate for  
charter schools**



Tennessee Charter  
School Center

# ABOUT TENNESSEE CHARTER SCHOOLS

## Tennessee Charter Schools are:

- Public schools
- Non-Profit managed
- Open & welcoming to ALL students
- Primarily local district authorized
- Making a Difference

## Currently, charter schools are located across four metro districts in Tennessee:

- Knox County
- Hamilton County
- Metro Nashville
- Shelby County

## Accountability:

TN Charter schools undergo ongoing monitoring each year by the local district and are subject to a thorough review or renewal every 5 years.

Making a difference

Quality & Excellence

Equity

Opportunity

# WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

## Why Advocacy Matters

Each day, the halls and inboxes of any state or national legislature are filled with advocates – paid and unpaid citizens who are advocating for causes they care about. Advocates' passion often influences state and national legislation, so school choice enthusiasts must ensure their voice is heard.

Advocacy means telling others that you support school choice—and why. And your voice has the power to positively impact your neighborhood and school.

Lawmakers decide if charter schools are allowed to operate in a given state, what regulations are applied to them, if they can grow, how they are funded, if their funding is equitable with other public schools, and so much more.

If you want to see school choice thrive in your neighborhood and city, you must voice your support to lawmakers.

The background features a faded, grayscale image of three children's faces. The child on the left is a girl with dark hair, the middle child is a boy with short hair, and the child on the right is a girl with dark hair. The image is partially covered by geometric shapes: an orange triangle in the top-left corner, a blue triangle in the bottom-left corner, and a green triangle in the bottom-right corner.

# TOP WAYS TO ADVOCATE

The Importance of Creating a Message .....	5
Maximizing Emails and Newsletters.....	6
How to Host a Legislative School Tour .....	7-8
How to Empower Your Parents .....	9



# CREATING A MESSAGE

## Telling Your Story

### COMPETITION.

Parents have increasing options about where to send their children to school, funders receive hundreds of asks per year and community members have many places they can choose to volunteer. A compelling, succinct message is the key to opening these doors and motivating people to choose you over the other options.

### EFFICIENCY.

If you tell a really good story right out of the gate, you're going to hook a donor, parent or teacher more quickly than if you stumble through many periphery messages before getting to your best message.

### PROFESSIONALISM.

Telling a sticky story elevates the public's perception of your school and builds trustworthiness and respect – both critical elements for stakeholder buy-in. This process will also help you create a more coherent, compelling brand that can be applied to all school communications.

MISSION CREEP. A strong internal story helps your staff stay on mission.

## 3 questions to answer when creating your story:

1. Why does your school exist?
2. What problem are you solving?
3. Why does the community need you?

# MAXIMIZING EMAILS & NEWSLETTERS

Emailing or writing your legislators is a quick way to influence change. In political advocacy, every voice counts – literally.

You can find your lawmakers' contact information using the Tennessee Legislator search: <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/legislators/>

## Step 1: Identify yourself

Make sure your legislator knows you are his or her constituent. Don't assume the legislator or staff person recognizes your address as being in their district. Do not send anonymous letters; include your name and address.

## Step 2: Cover only one topic per letter/email

Different staff in a legislator's office cover different issues. If you attempt to cover multiple topics in one message, it may become lost or hung up with one staff person. If you have more than one issue to address, send more than one letter or email.

## Step 3: Sell your position

Be brief and concise. Prepare your letter clearly so it is easy to read.



# HOSTING A LEGISLATIVE TOUR

## Part I

*One of the best ways to influence a state legislator is by exposing them directly to the life-transforming work your school does on a daily basis.*

*Proactively plan to invite your legislators to tour your school once a year.*

### **Before the Visit:**

1. Choose a few potential days for a visit that work well for your school schedule.
2. Send an invitation to the legislator's office that includes the date, time, location and type of visit (school tour, event, etc.).
3. Plan the visit in detail and send a copy of the schedule to the legislator's office.
4. Consider sending a press release to local media outlets.
5. Compile a school fact sheet with impressive information about your school. Include information about how you use Charter Schools Program and state funding.
6. Contact the Tennessee Charter School Center once you have confirmed your tour date and time.



# HOSTING A LEGISLATIVE TOUR

## Part II

### ✓ During the Visit:

1. Think through the message you want to communicate about your school.


*Consider your school's "why" – why do you exist? How are you making an impact? Why does your school matter? How does your school affect your community? Address these pressing questions in a simple, compelling "why" story where you tell the legislator exactly why your school matters.*

2. Give a compelling overview of your school and tour several classrooms.
3. Allow time for Q & A.
4. Describe the impact that state and national funding have on your school, and address any upcoming legislation.

### ✓ After the Visit:

1. Send a prompt thank you note.
2. Share photos on your school's social media and consider sending a press release.
3. Invite the legislator to future events at your school.





# EMPOWER YOUR PARENTS

## Utilizing Community Voices

1. Incorporate a “Policy” section into your weekly or monthly parent newsletter. In this section, help parents understand what is going on at the state or national level that affects their child’s education and school.
2. Meet with the Parent group (for example, the PTO) at your school and educate them about why advocacy is important. If there are significant upcoming decisions at the state or national level, ask to be included on the next parent meeting agenda and explain the current climate to families. Give them specific steps for advocacy and involvement.
3. Clearly communicate with families about how policy personally affects your school and their students. For instance, if funding formulas are up for debate at the state level, show parents how your school’s funding differs from others.
4. Think through your school’s future and identify moments when you will need parent support. Begin to lay the groundwork for this support now.
5. Engage your Board of Directors in advocacy work. Their voice as constituents in the community can be a powerful tool in education advocacy.

# ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The Tennessee Charter School Center serves as the only charter school support organization in the state of Tennessee.

TCSC provides resources for board governance, quality programming, advocacy support and operations.

TCSC works with elected officials, local school districts, charter school leaders and community support organizations to ensure a high level of accountability and quality for all charter schools in Tennessee.

## We are focused on:



Education & Awareness



Policy & Advocacy  
Leadership



Innovation & Incubation



Quality & Growth

## Contact Information:

Website: [www.tnchartercenter.org](http://www.tnchartercenter.org)

Email: [learn@tnchartercenter.org](mailto:learn@tnchartercenter.org)

### Nashville Office

209 10th Ave. South Suite 416

Nashville TN 37203

615.401.7222

### Memphis Office

1350 Concourse Ave., Suite 434

Memphis, TN 38104

615.401.7222