

# SHARING *YOUR* STORY

## **Engagement and Outreach Resource Guide**

This resource guide contains immediate resources to walk you through identifying outreach opportunities and how to share your successes as a school. We hope that this is helpful for you to use as you explore the best ways to engage with stakeholders from daily interactions in your community to inviting your state legislator to visit your school.



THE GOVERNOR JOHN ENGLER  
**CENTER FOR  
CHARTER SCHOOLS**  
CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

## IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS

You know your community better than anyone else. As you review the ideas below consider the thought leaders and community members that need to be informed on the success of your school, the critical role you play in your community, and the unique ways they could work with you to serve your students.

### Inform

### Partner

### Engage

School Champions	Community Leaders	Critical Education Stakeholders
They are the best champions for your school that can truly speak to the impact you have on your students' lives. Ensure you are keeping them informed of the great things happening at your school.	They are key to supporting your school's efforts and making sure the school is viewed as an important part of your community. Ensure you are welcoming them into your school and identifying ways you can partner to offer resources to your students.	They are involved in the decisions that drive policymaking on school funding and education policy. Ensure you are connecting with them and letting them know the impact your school has on the students that you serve.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Parents and families</li> <li>» Graduates</li> <li>» Teachers</li> <li>» School Leaders</li> <li>» School Board Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Community Organization Leaders</li> <li>» Non-Profit Partners</li> <li>» Local Elected Officials – City Council, County Commission, Township Trustees</li> <li>» Local Business Leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» State Representative</li> <li>» State Senator</li> </ul>

## STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING WITH STATE LEGISLATORS

It is important for you to identify the state representative and senator that represents the address where your school is located, so you can begin to build relationships with them. To assist with this our office has created a document that lists each CMU partner school and the state legislators that represents that district. This resource is available at [www.TheCenterForCharters.org/legislators](http://www.TheCenterForCharters.org/legislators).

Additional resources that are helpful in identifying state legislators:

- » **State Representatives** — [www.house.mi.gov](http://www.house.mi.gov)
- » **State Senators** — [www.senate.michigan.gov](http://www.senate.michigan.gov)

Building relationships with your state legislators is critically important. As they get to know you and your school, they will have a better understanding of the positive impact you have on your students' lives and their learning environment. Below we will walk you through ways to build that relationship and the important messages they need to hear from you.

## Engagement Opportunities

### » Introductory/Congratulatory Letters

Send short letters to your state legislators, congratulating them on their election to office and sharing with them a little background information about your school and the students/families it serves. Any innovative partnerships, results, or activities also could be shared. Close with an invitation to visit and tour your school during the coming months. A sample letter template is provided at the end of this resource guide.

### » School Tours

Your school is unique and well-connected within the legislator's community. So show them what you've built! You can reach out to each legislator's office with an invitation to tour your space and meet your students, teachers, and families. It will be tremendously impactful for your legislator to see your schools and students in person. The Key Items to Remember and Speaking with Your Legislator sections below include helpful hints on how to make this tour as successful as possible.

### » In-District Office Visits & Coffee Hours

Most, if not all, state legislators hold local coffees or in-district office hours to help them stay connected to the people they serve. These are fantastic opportunities for you to establish connections, share information, and get a sense of their ideas. To find these hours, visit the legislator's website and social media pages, or simply call their offices.

### » March is Reading Month

During the month of March, you'll want to invite your state legislators and community leaders to be part of your school's celebrations. Common ideas are to have legislators and other dignitaries come to read to your students, be read to by your students, or participate in a small gathering that includes members of the media. These events are designed to be engaging, fun and friendly—and they're a great way to have legislators see the great work your school is doing.

### » Graduation

When your planning begins, consider finding roles for your state legislators. From invocations to diploma distribution and everything in between, policy leaders will appreciate the opportunity to be involved in this important occasion. This is not limited to high school graduations. Remember to invite them to participate in your end-of-year celebrations for all grade levels.

### » Board Meetings and PTA Meetings

A great way to show the tremendous work you are doing can be inviting your legislators to speak with your leaders at a board meeting or PTA meeting. They can witness the high levels of engagement in your school and become even more aware of the good work you're doing.

### » Visit Lansing!

Whether it's a school visit, the annual Charter School Day at the Capitol, or just a time for you to connect personally with your legislators, visits to Lansing are always a good idea. If you plan to set up a meeting, grab your calendar and reach out to the legislator's office. Once your visit is scheduled, develop a small packet of leave-behinds that are related to your school. Student artwork is always a great thing to share with them. *Our office is happy to help facilitate the scheduling of visits to Lansing. Please contact Jason Mancini, our director of public policy, at [JMancini@thecenterforcharters.org](mailto:JMancini@thecenterforcharters.org) for assistance.*

**Note:** Be thoughtful about bringing students with you if you are pulling them out of school to do so. Unless it is a non-school day or a Capitol visit is already planned for learning purposes, it's best to bring just yourself or a small group of adults so you are not disrupting the students' school day.

### » Interact on Social Media

Be sure to like and follow your state legislators on social media. It is a great way to keep track of their activities and engage with them on topics important to you. But don't stop there. If they visit your school, be sure to take pictures and tag them!

## Key Items to Remember

- » When scheduling time with a legislator, provide as much detail as possible so they are aware of what to expect for their time with you.
- » If it is a school visit or event, plan for someone to greet them when they arrive.
- » Ask if you can take pictures of their visit and post them to your social media accounts. Be sure to tag them in the post.
- » Thank them for their time and share that you would like to have continued dialogue with them on topics important to education and your school. You could even have your students make a thank you note to send to them following their visit.
- » Remain consistent in your outreach and invite them to participate in events throughout the school year. See the engagement opportunities above for ideas.

## Speaking with Your Legislator

### 1. Introduce Your School

- » Give a brief overview of your history and approach.
- » Describe the students you serve and tell why your program has proven to be the right fit for them.
- » Do you have innovative programs, outstanding results, or compelling local connections to share? If you can create infographics or handouts, this could be a great opportunity to provide a visual to help tell your school's story.

### 2. Share Your Impact

- » Personalize your message by sharing the impact your school has on your students. You should have a few things ready to share about points of pride and success stories.
- » Talk about your most distinguished graduates and the feedback of students, parents, educators and others.

### 3. Talk about the Challenges

- » Briefly detail the obstacles you've overcome, as well as your hopes for the future. What is next for your school, and how can your legislators help? Be sure to be positive and see them as a partner in supporting the needs of educators and schools.

### 4. Finish Strong

- » Thank the legislator for their time, and express hope for the future. Invite partnership and map out some next steps that will keep your legislator engaged with you and your school.

## CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL TALKING POINTS

We hope the messaging included in this section can support you as you navigate commonly discussed themes regarding charter public schools.

**Michigan charter public schools innovate to offer valuable opportunities to students and families that need them.**

- » Charter public schools offer specialized educational opportunities to every Michigan student that wants them. From environmental science and engineering to aviation, visual arts, and much more, there are unique educational opportunities available at charter schools across the state.

## **Michigan’s charter public schools embrace all students—because every child is worth fighting for.**

- » Charter schools are free and open to all students. They cannot discriminate based on academic performance, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, or for any other reason.
- » Charter schools in Michigan enroll a greater percentage of students of color and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch than the state average.
- » When demand exceeds the number of available seats, charter schools are required by law to hold a random selection lottery.

## **Charter public schools are the most accountable of all Michigan public schools.**

- » Michigan’s charter public schools are subject to all the same laws, rules, and regulations as traditional public schools. They have public governing boards and—most uniquely of all— they have the extra oversight provided by their authorizers.
- » Charter public schools employ highly-qualified, state-certified public school teachers.

## **Charter public schools are public schools.**

- » Charter public schools are publicly funded by state and federal dollars.
- » Charter public schools may not have a religious affiliation.
- » Charter public schools themselves are not for-profit entities. The charter contract is held between the authorizing body and the school’s public, non-profit board.
- » The school’s board is free to contract with a management company to provide the school with various services.

## **SUPPORTING YOUR EFFORTS**

Our team is always here to help answer questions, discuss ideas that are unique to your school, or provide additional resources that may be helpful. If you have a school visit scheduled, be sure to connect with us and let us know about your experience. You can always reach out to your school lead or our external relations team:

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## **SCHOOL TEMPLATES**

The following Microsoft Word documents are provided to help you get started building a relationship with your legislators. Please feel free to customize and adapt them as you see fit.

- » [Sample Congratulatory Letter for New Legislator from School](#)
- » [Sample Letter Inviting Legislator to March is Reading Month Visit](#)
- » [Press Release Template for a School Event](#)