



## HOW TO START A LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN

A letter writing campaign is a great way to send out many letters to a specific audience advocating for the arts. You may choose to write to school board members, administrators, state policymakers, parents, or business owners to alert these groups to things that are occurring in your art setting. The following describes how two elementary art teachers began a letter writing campaign in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

In October, 2007, Heide Sheetz and Wendy Milne hosted a letter writing campaign. Their goal was to have community members write to policy makers about the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. The process involved several more steps than they had anticipated but ended with over 270 handwritten letters being sent to legislators, state representatives, the governor and senators. Be sure to answer these questions to help you get started. ~What is your goal? Be specific. Asking people to write a letter about how much they like art will not benefit you as much as having a specific goal. Write out the goal and copy it for letter writers. Hang the goals in the setting so all can see them. ~To whom will you write? Have addresses typed and copied for letter writers. See “contacts” on this CD for a list of newspaper addresses and links to find policymakers in your region. Also, see this file for examples of addresses prepared for the Milne and Sheetz’s letter writing campaign. ~Who are you asking to write letters? Will this group have an effect on the intended audience? (For example, will superintendents respond better to college professors or business owners? Will school board members respond more to parents or teachers? Will museum boards respond more to museum members or museum donors?) ~How will you contact people to write letters?

Create invitations to distribute to people in the public. Keep them in your pocket and hand out at the store, mall, etc. (See examples of invitations under “Letter writing campaign.”) Ask colleagues, student teachers or interns to also distribute the invitations. Ask local museums, galleries or art stores to post the event at their location or on their website. Be sure to find out when and where you are permitted to distribute invitations. Sheetz and Milne got permission from administrators to distribute handouts at an Open House as well as handing out invitations in the community. They also posted the invitation on the PSEA and PAEA websites. Additionally, personal mailings were made to all art teachers in the community. They were not permitted to post the invitation on the school website or school email due to technology policies. ~Where will you host the letter writing campaign? Keep in mind these questions: Will it cost money? If so, who will pay? Will this setting have enough seats? Will there be enough parking? Can you collaborate? Consider collaborating with a museum or university in your area that offers arts courses. The host site could possibly be at the college during one of the art education classes. This would also provide future art teachers the opportunity to advocate for the arts. Often museums are open late one night per week. Sheetz and



Milne chose to use one of their schools but were sure to ask school board members permission to use one of the buildings in advance. This method helped them gain support from school board members, showing the members that they wanted to work together to help get more funding for schools to keep the arts. Finally, provide clear directions to the host site. If it is hard to find, people will not attend. ~When will you host the event? Consider making it prior to a museum board, school board or PTA meeting so that people can use one evening for two meetings. Or offer it directly after school so that parents who are picking up their child can write the letter without making a second trip. Make it as easy for people to attend as possible.

~What supplies will you need? Paper, pens, envelopes, informational material that includes the goal of the letter writing, postage. Milne and Sheetz provided pens and paper as well as copied information detailing the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. Since a line of communication was opened at the school board meeting, one of the school board members donated 500 envelopes. Postage was paid for anyone who wrote a letter at the host site. Anyone who chose to write letters off site was asked to provide his or her own postage. Donations for postage could also be requested. Consider using postcards to lower the cost of postage. Also include a sign-in sheet in order to contact supporters in the future and to send thank you letters (See sample sign in sheet for arts supporters file for a sign-in sheet). ~Why letters instead of emails? While emails are gaining in power, a handwritten letter still holds the most weight. Sheetz and Milne included email addresses on the handouts so that people who attended the campaign could take home the information and have others email. ~Why handwritten vs. typed? Milne and Sheetz asked attendants to handwrite the letters. They made the assumption that handwriting would only take 10-15 minutes per person.

They discovered that most people needed 30-45 minutes when handwriting. Many of the people who attended stated that they would rather have typed their letters. Can you find a site that allows people access to computers and printers? ~Why personalized letters vs. form letters? When people start receiving over 100 copies of the same letter, it is often disregarded. Milne and Sheetz supplied short facts about the reauthorization about No Child Left Behind to help meet the goal of the campaign but also requested that the letter writer add personal reasons why they felt the arts needed to remain a core subject in NCLB. (See Research information under "Letter writing campaign" for examples of what Milne and Sheetz provided). ~Is the host site going to feature Art? Provide an Art Setting if possible. Milne and Sheetz hosted the letter writing campaign in an elementary art room setting for a variety of reasons. One reason is because elementary art rooms are often eliminated and replaced with "art on a cart." By hosting in an actual art room, the public was able to see a real art room and notice the importance of that setting for a child's education. ~What displays should you post?

Display art work and posters throughout the hallways and room so the letter writers will see what the children are learning. Write up posters that describe the learning that took



place. Bulletin boards with titles such as “Why Study Art?” or “Look what our students are learning through Art” help to emphasize the importance of art in a child’s education. Consider projecting a PowerPoint presentation of children performing in the arts so that people waiting can watch.~Should you host the letter writing campaign alone?No. Collaborate with museums, universities, or other colleagues such as the Music or Dance teachers. Don’t try to take on a large event by yourself. Milne and Sheetz asked the music teachers to have a small group of elementary children perform in the hallways as letter writers entered. They were sure, though, to make sure the emphasis was on the writing rather than the performance. ~Should I have activities for children?While this event is not meant to entertain kids, many parents will not be able to have a baby sitter.

Create a quiet area for children to draw or read art books while the parents are writing. ~Why shouldn’t I just give the letter writing information to the people to take home?If you send home the information it tends to remain on the desk where it is set. In asking people to actually write at the host site, you will provide people with the time and supplies necessary to write the letter. If people are asked to do it at home, they will often put it aside or lose the information. Do provide information for people to take home AFTER they have written the letter. Encourage them to share this information with other family members or neighbors. ~What else should I provide to the people that come to the campaign?Keep in mind, the goal is to have people write a letter without taking up too much of their time. If you wish, provide cookies or a beverage.

Davis Publications donated art calendars to Sheetz and Milne. The calendars were offered on a first-come, first-serve basis since they had more letter writers than calendars. ~Who else should I contact?Alert the media! (see newspaper contacts on this CD). Milne and Sheetz gave an invitation to the newspaper correspondent that covers the school board meetings. As a result, journalist, Chris Foreman, decided to feature an article, “Arts being ‘left behind’ under No Child program (see [www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/s\\_530020.html](http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/s_530020.html)) and highlighted when and where the letter writing campaign would be held. ~What do I do when the event is over? Be sure to send thank you notes, especially to parents who brought their children to perform. Take photos of performers and use them on thank you cards or in school newspapers. Thank the host site owners, people who wrote letters, people who donated supplies, janitors, etc. Finally,~Write your own letter to your intended audience describing why you hosted the event and the results. Take photos of the letter writing campaign and send along to your audience. Milne and Sheetz tallied the number of letters and waited one month before writing to all the legislators/representatives. (See a copy of this letter under “Letter writing campaign.”