



Sample Communications Letter to the Editor

To the editor:

Thank you for your recent article about the proposed school levy (“County officials divided on school levy”). As a lifelong resident of Alamance County, and retired teacher who taught in our public schools, I want to make sure that the decades ahead of us are the best they can be. The quality of our schools is one of the best predictors of our county’s future economic and social fortunes; the kind of education we provide today will shape what kind of workforce, leaders, and community members we have tomorrow.

Just like braiding a rope, children learn by developing new skills and weaving and reweaving them in combination with other skills—every new skill is a strand that makes the rope stronger. These strands include cognitive skills, as well as the social and emotional skills children need to work in teams, solve problems, and handle conflict and challenges. Instead of being made out of nylon or sisal, these strands are made out of hands-on learning opportunities, well-equipped classrooms, mentors and afterschool programs, updated buildings, and curricula designed to prepare them for the jobs of the future. The strength of the “skills ropes” children develop greatly influences their long-term outcomes.

Traditionally, letters to the editor are first-person perspectives about an issue, but strategic framers know that emphasizing individual opinions can backfire when trying to build support for collective-level solutions. By demonstrating her role in the community and relationship to the subject before moving to a more collective perspective, the author bends, but doesn’t break, this rule.

Before members of the public will support your issue, they first need to understand why it matters. Strategic framers appeal to widely shared values at the start of a message to establish what’s at stake. This example uses the values of **Prosperity** and **Future Preparation**; in large-scale testing, these two values have been shown to move people’s attitudes and beliefs about childhood development and education in a productive direction.

Explanatory metaphors use memorable comparisons to make complex ideas like brain development or how children learn more accessible to non-experts. By comparing unfamiliar ideas to familiar ones, these tested analogies quickly build people’s understanding of how an issue works, making it easier for them to see why the proposed solution is appropriate. Here, the metaphor **Weaving Skills Ropes** explains how children learn and what resources are necessary for that learning process to be successful, in order to set up a discussion about why it’s necessary to invest in these things.

Depending on the type of communication and its goals, framers can use a light touch or develop the metaphor more fully. Whenever possible, it’s best to let the metaphor “breathe” by expanding on the concept and weaving it throughout the message. Repetition is an important part of framing.

Building skills ropes takes resources. Long before I started school in Burlington, county residents voted to set aside taxes to make sure that when my generation reached the classroom, our schools would be equipped to help us weave the strong skills ropes we would need for the jobs and civic life that followed our graduation. They paid taxes forward—generating and setting aside resources for future use—to benefit Alamance County’s future. Just like the roads we drive on and the electrical grid we use to power our homes, the schools we have today exist because people in the past planned ahead for us to have what they knew we would need to thrive. Now it’s our turn to do the same for those who follow us. Voting for the levy is about making sure our schools are ready to help our children and our children’s children develop the skills Alamance County needs to knit a strong future.

I urge everyone to support the school levy. The shape of the future is outlined by the plans we put in place today. Investing in our children now will pay social and economic dividends for all of Alamance tomorrow.

Members of the public are fatalistic about government’s ability to solve problems and have little understanding of how public budgets and taxes work. For example, many Americans think of taxes as something individuals pay in order to receive individual benefits, rather than common goods like infrastructure, schools, and health and safety systems. The metaphor **Forward Exchange** helps explain how taxes operate as part of a planning process in which we take steps now to ensure that we will have public services in the future.

In this example, the author uses concrete examples like roads and schools to help people understand how we all benefit from the public goods paid for by taxes. Specific examples are an important explanatory tool that can make abstract concepts easier for non-experts to grasp.

“Knit a strong future” is a subtle use of both the **Future Preparation** value and the **Weaving Skills Ropes** metaphor. Tested framing strategies are designed to be flexible, malleable tools, so that communicators can use their creativity when applying them to their own communications.

This closing paragraph makes “an ask” of its readers and then finishes with one last dose of the recommended values in order to reinforce the public importance of the issue.