Making the Media Work for You

In advocacy for children and youth with exceptionalities, their families and the professionals who work on their behalf, the essence of our job is to make our voices heard. As CAN Coordinators, you do this in a variety of ways, from developing relationships with your members of Congress, building a network in your state unit or division, developing an online social media presence and of course engaging with the media.

There are a variety of different ways to engage with the media – from commenting on stories to issuing press releases and media advisories regularly for events and advocacy pushes in your area. This newsletter, however, is specifically about how you, and your unit or division, can use Op-Eds to ensure that the voice of children and youth with exceptionalities, their families, and the professionals who work on their behalf are heard.

What is an Op-Ed?

An op-ed, which is short for “opposite the editorial page,” is an article which expresses the opinion of a writer, who is not affiliated with the paper. Newspapers, and more importantly their readers, are looking to read other’s opinions on the issues faced by a particular community or state, or even nation. You can use this to your advantage. When you get an op-ed published in a local paper, you’ve gotten the media outlet to act as your mouth piece. With one short article, you can reach, hundreds or thousands of people.
Tips and Tricks for Op-Eds

1. Make sure to state your opinions clearly and concisely. Op-eds are definitively the place for strong language about the impact (positive or negative) of a certain policy or issue.

2. Use specifics! Just because this is an opinion piece doesn’t mean you don’t need to back up your claims with data. That data can be anecdotal if you know how a certain law will impact your school, students, teachers, and/or ability to provide services. But the more (accurate and verified) numbers you can use, the better.

3. Mention your elected officials by name. Whether you’re directing your op-ed to the House, the Senate, or any other elected position, make sure you use the person’s name directly in the piece. Appeal to them to take the direction you’re advocating for. Most elected officials have someone in their office whose job it is every morning to find all pieces of media that mention that elected official’s name. Make sure you end up in their morning pile!

4. Keep your op-eds timely and relevant. While an issue may be important to you and your community, if it hasn’t been in the news recently, your op-ed is unlikely to be published. Make sure that your op-ed is tied to a timely piece of legislation or action.

As always let us know when you get published so that we can share your op-ed.