Success Stories and Data: The Perfect Marriage for Successful Advocacy

CEC is currently collecting success stories for its Federal Outlook for Exceptional Children [link to last year’s version] publication for Fiscal Year 2014. Every year CEC publishes this book and every year the request for stories comes around. You may often find yourself wondering why? The Federal Outlook publication is the perfect combination of pathos and ethos – numerical, factual data as well as personal stories about the importance and success of these programs. The success story provides the emotional impact of a name and a face, while the data informs the more practical concerns such as the budget and the distribution of funds.

So, the success stories and the data are an important to make the Federal Outlook effective, but that isn’t the only place they are helpful. Knowing the data about how programs in your state are funded, how many students are served and how many teachers are employed, and then backing it up with a story about a student who was successful because of these programs is an important part of all advocacy work. You can use this combination when:

a. Meeting with legislators
b. Encouraging your network to participate in advocacy efforts
c. Speaking with members of the media
d. Writing op-eds for local papers

These are all parts of your role as CAN Coordinators where being able to provide data and then demonstrate that data’s importance to individual students will be particularly relevant. Now onto the ever important question – how do you go about obtaining this information?

The Hunt for Relevant Data

There are a variety of places where you can obtain relevant data, depending on what issue you choose to focus your advocacy on. If you aren’t sure which resource will provide the appropriate numbers, feel free to ask us! The links below are definitely a good place to start.

1. CEC’s Federal Outlook (http://www.cec.sped.org/CEC-Extras/federal_outlook/default.htm) – for basic information such as how much money your state receives per program, check out CEC’s Federal Outlook.
2. IDEA Data (www.idealdata.org) – here you can find state-by-state break downs of the number of children served, broken out by disability category, as well as other data specific to IDEA programs.
3. U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Data (http://ocrdata.ed.gov/) – here you can find data broken out by district on civil rights issues in schools. This resource is particularly relevant for issues pertaining to discipline and representation.

4. Regional Technical Assistance and Dissemination Centers (http://www.rrcprogram.org/cms2/) – these regional centers provide technical assistance and provide information. They would be a good place to start if you aren’t sure where to find data for a specific issue in your region.

Capturing Success Stories

For the other half of this marriage, the success story, look no further than your own network. As a professional in the field of special and/or gifted education, you already have your own experiences to draw from. Use success stories from your school and from other teachers and professionals you know.

And of course, your CEC network is a goldmine of success stories. Rather than waiting for the CEC Federal Outlook deadline to come around every year, collect success stories periodically from your network via email or a form on your state unit/division website. Putting the call for success stories on your social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, or in your newsletter, are both good ways to get the word out as well.

As always, share what you get with your friendly neighborhood policy team over at CEC Headquarters. Not only do we love to hear about the successes of the students in your network, but the success stories also help our advocacy, both within the Federal Outlook publication and within our other advocacy efforts.

Questions? Comments? Concerns? Suggestions? Email Sara at sarad@cec.sped.org or give us a call at 703-264-9498.