

How to Pitch and Place Media, and Prepare for Media Interviews

Introduction

Effective media engagement is essential for elevating voices, shaping narratives, and influencing public perception. As public education faces unprecedented threats, including efforts to dismantle the Department of Education, it is critical to advocate for the defense and improvement of public schools.

Thoughtful pitching and interview preparation can increase visibility, establish credibility, and ensure that data-driven arguments reach key audiences.

This guide outlines best practices for securing media attention, using data to support messaging, and preparing spokespeople to deliver impactful interviews.

Media Outreach & Interview Support

Proactive media outreach and relationship-building with reporters helps to increase awareness and drive conversations about the importance of public education.

The goal is to:

- Provide expertise on emerging threats to public education and policy shifts.
- Influence public discourse with accurate, data-backed narratives.
- Build relationships with journalists to ensure continued media presence.

Strategic outreach includes monitoring education policy trends, identifying opportunities to engage, and tailoring pitches to specific reporters and outlets covering education, politics, and social justice.

Identifying Newsworthy Opportunities

A strong media pitch should align with the current news cycle and offer valuable, data-driven insights. Here's how to assess whether an opportunity is newsworthy:

- **Timeliness:** Ensure your story connects with breaking news, proposed policy changes, or legislative debates.

- **Planning:** Anticipate coverage around the legislative cycle, court decisions, federal budget allocations, elections, and education conferences.
 - **Expertise:** Position yourself as a knowledgeable source with research-driven insights.
 - **Differentiation:** Highlight unique data points or policy perspectives that set your viewpoint apart.
 - **Audience Impact:** Choose between national, regional, or local outlets based on the communities most affected by education policies.
 - **Message Alignment:** Maintain consistency in messaging, ensuring all statements reflect an evidence-based defense of public education.
 - **Social Media Use:** Engage with journalists on platforms like Twitter/X or BluSky to track emerging conversations on education policy.
 - **Research:** Stay informed using tools like Google News, Axios newsletters, The Hechinger Report, Education Week, Chronicle of Higher Education and data sources from trusted education and research partners like EdTrust.
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Crafting a Compelling Media Pitch

A well-crafted pitch increases the likelihood of securing media coverage. Key elements include:

- **Personalization:** Reference the reporter's previous work and explain why your pitch is relevant to them.
 - **Compelling Subject Line:** Summarize the core of your pitch in a concise, engaging way.
 - **Data-Driven Arguments:** Support your pitch with statistics, research, or historical context.
 - **Brevity:** Keep the pitch clear and to the point—reporters receive hundreds of emails daily.
 - **Explicit Ask:** Clearly state what you need from the reporter:
 - "Would you like a preview of the report on declining public school funding?"
 - "Can we set up a call to discuss the impact of dismantling the Department of Education?"
 - "Are you interested in covering new research on school privatization policies?"
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Preparing for a Media Interview

Preparation is key to effective media engagement. Here's how to get ready:

- **Know Your Reporter:** Research their past coverage on education policy and public school issues.
- **Key Messages:** Identify 3-4 core points that defend public education and reinforce the importance of equitable policies.

- **Talking Points:** Use data and real-world examples to support your claims while avoiding jargon and acronyms.
 - **Anticipate Questions:** Prepare responses that counter common narratives pushing for privatization or budget cuts.
 - **Clarity:** Use straightforward language to ensure your points resonate with a broad audience.
 - **Storytelling:** Incorporate personal anecdotes from educators, students, and parents to humanize your data-driven arguments.
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Placing Op-eds and Letters to the Editor

Op-eds provide a platform for influencing public discourse without relying on traditional media coverage. However, securing placement in major outlets requires a strategic, data-driven approach. Best practices include:

- **Authorship:** Single bylines establish credibility, while co-authored pieces can expand reach.
- **Relevance:** Tie your op-ed to current education policy debates, legislative proposals, or breaking news.
- **Clear Thesis:** State your argument early and include a direct call to action for public school advocacy.
- **Evidence-Based:** Use strong data and policy analysis to support your viewpoint.
- **Values-Driven:** Connect to shared values such as equal access to education, community investment, and democracy.

Given the competitive nature of op-ed placements, it's important to target the right outlets and consider alternative publishing platforms if traditional media does not accept the piece.

Final Considerations

Successful media engagement requires planning, persistence, and adaptability. Whether pitching a story, preparing for an interview, or drafting an op-ed, the key is to provide value, remain authentic, and use data to reinforce key messages.

For best results:

- Define clear media goals that center around defending and improving public schools.
- Prepare materials in advance, including key messages and statistical evidence.
- Follow up with journalists while respecting their time and editorial process.

- Monitor media coverage to assess impact and refine future outreach strategies.

By implementing these best practices, advocates for public education can build strong media relationships, increase visibility, and drive meaningful conversations that shape the future of public schools.