

# We, the Media

Don't you just love the start of a new school year? When I was in school, September wasn't just about cracking open a fresh notebook and donning new outfits (and yes, I debated for days over what to wear on the first day). A new school year meant a fresh start: a chance to learn something new, fall in love with a new subject, and rediscover old ones. Although I've been out of school for some time, the notion of a restart in September has stuck. The start of school now means "everyone back to work" after a summer-time lull. Because who is really going to pay attention to important, news-making education analyses when many readers are poolside?

For state board of education members, the start of a new school year presents another opportunity: It provides a natural news hook for communicating about key education issues. One of the more accessible ways to do that is to write an op-ed for your local paper. As respected public officials, state board members are naturals for this sort of writing. Here are three angles you might use:

**1) What's on Your Agenda?** The start of a new school year is a good reminder to teachers, parents, community leaders, policymakers, and others that your state board is working hard to ensure all students receive a high-quality education. Share what items will be on the board's agenda in the coming year—explain why—and invite stakeholders to get involved. Nebraska's Rachel Wise wrote just such an article this year for a local paper.

 <http://katcountryhub.com/tag/rachel-wise/>

**2) Back-to-School Facts.** In the education domain, misinformation spreads like wildfire, and it's not unusual for someone to get it wrong. An article on "Five Facts You Didn't Know about Education in [Your State]," or "Three Myths about Education in

[Your State]" could help set the record straight and provide context around more controversial state board decisions. Earlier this year, Virginia's Chris Braunlich argued in an op-ed that the Commonwealth's education spending has not kept pace with the growing needs of students.

 [http://www.richmond.com/opinion/their-opinion/guest-columnists/article\\_aa7ae785-5271-5167-be39-a36a8675d8c4.html](http://www.richmond.com/opinion/their-opinion/guest-columnists/article_aa7ae785-5271-5167-be39-a36a8675d8c4.html)

He built his case with clear facts about Virginia's schools and state board policies.

**3) State Achievement.** Does the public know what decisions your state board has made? Do they know how particular decisions have led to improved student learning? West Virginia's Gayle Manchin last year showcased her state's progress as a pilot state for the community eligibility provision under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, a program that gives all students free school meals in qualifying schools, regardless of income.

 <http://www.wvgazette.com/article/20140524/ARTICLE/140529600>

No matter what the topic, the key to op-ed writing is timing. The most memorable, impactful opinion pieces take advantage of issues that are already making headlines and provide a fresh view of those issues. They might also be forward thinking. Plot your "back to school" op-ed this September. As state board members pitching these pieces to local editors, you have a certain advantage: The decisions you make may actually become headlines in your state. ■



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