



NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR COMMUNITY AND EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Promoting Education Partnerships and Access to Higher Education

Op-eds Guidelines & Talking Points



An op-ed is an easy way to make a BIG impact. Editors do not publish every op-ed, but they do pay attention—especially to articles that are well-written and connected to a piece they just published. Here are a few helpful tips:

Writing Your Op-ed

- **Make it relevant**
Relate your op-ed to an issue recently (within the last day or two) discussed in the publication to which you are writing. Many outlets are picking up on the defense cuts included in sequestration so this may be a time to bring the non-defense cuts to light.
- **Be concise**
The first sentence should summarize your position. One of the biggest mistakes in an op-ed is using the first paragraph to build an argument. Most editors read 2-3 sentences before making a decision to go on. You don't need to include all of the talking points (see below) – just the ones relevant to the story.
- **Mind your word count**
Check the op-ed guidelines for the paper you are targeting. If they give a word count, follow it. If they don't, 750 words are generally considered the maximum length. Many papers will not consider op-eds that exceed the word count.
- **Use YOUR voice**
Have a student, alumni, parent, partner and/or staff “tell” their own story, in their own words, to illustrate the talking points.

Submitting Your Op-ed

Many newspapers have specific format requirements, so please check the paper's website before submitting. Always include full contact information for the author(s). [Click here](#) to find your local media outlets.

- **Follow the guidelines**
Follow the outlet's rules regarding op-eds and make sure to adhere to the guidelines on length. Spell everything correctly and pay close attention to grammar—articles are not usually edited, rather the outlets select well-written pieces that meet their guidelines.
- **Email your op-ed to ensure timeliness**
To do this, paste the op-ed text into the body of an email—DO NOT SEND AS AN ATTACHMENT. You may also fax it, but sending it electronically is generally the preferred way to receive op-eds.
- **Follow up**
Once you have submitted your op-ed, follow up with a call 24 hours later to find out if it will be printed.



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Talking Points

Op-eds should weave one or more of the following talking points into the personal story/perspective of the article-writer:



- **Sequestration is bad for GEAR UP, education and all Americans**
Cuts to non-defense discretionary funding threaten bipartisan, national priorities, which support economic growth and strengthen the safety and security of every American in every state and community across the nation.
- **GEAR UP is a competitive grant program of the U.S. Department of Education**
GEAR UP increases the number of low-income, minority, and first-generation students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. It is a bipartisan, public-private educational partnership created by Congress in 1998.
- **GEAR UP Is Community-Based**
GEAR UP provides six-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. The program unites the entire community in a responsive, creative and research-based effort to get entire classrooms of low-income, minority and disadvantaged children and their families, ready for higher education.
- **GEAR UP Leverages Local Resources**
Because GEAR UP is built around public-private partnerships, it enlists the formidable resources of government, industry, business, labor, community groups and places of worship alike, in the cause of helping low-income students prepare, enter and succeed in college.
- **GEAR UP Is Cohort-Based**
GEAR UP works with entire grade levels, and whole schools, supporting low-income students and their families, starting no later than the 7th grade (middle school), through high school and onward to fulfill their dreams of attaining a postsecondary education.
- **GEAR UP Is Research-Based**
GEAR UP helps local school systems improve student achievement by providing them with resources, training and expertise to use the most effective and evidence-based interventions.
- **GEAR UP Provides Critical Early College Awareness and Support Activities**
The program includes interventions such as tutoring, mentoring, rigorous academic preparation, financial education and college scholarships to improve access to higher education for low income, minority and disadvantaged first-generation students and their families.
- **GEAR UP Works**
The program now serves more than 580,000 low-income, minority and disadvantaged students nationwide in 42 states, the District of Columbia, and three U.S. Territories.



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Sample Op-Ed

We've drafted the following op-ed template to help guide you. Feel free to use this version, or draft your own from scratch!



SAMPLE OP-ED

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
[DAY, DATE, AND TIME]

CONTACT: [YOUR NAME HERE]
TEL.: [YOUR PHONE HERE]

Special to **[Name of Paper]**:

"Sequestration hurts our economic prosperity"

by **[YOUR NAME]**

(750 words)

Sequestration threatens bipartisan, national priorities, which support economic growth and strengthen the safety and security of Americans in every state and community. Congress needs to work together to find a balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not include further cuts to non-defense discretionary programs, such as GEAR UP.

Think about it: if America is to remain strong, secure and competitive in the world, our students need training far more rigorous than that we experienced as children. A child in the third grade today will need advanced training in math, science, reading and technology just to keep pace with children in Finland, India and Japan. With the technological, scientific and medical advances of today, one can only imagine the demanding academic curriculum that awaits a child born five years from now.

No question about it: our students will have to set their sights high just to maintain the discipline needed to complete such a rigorous program of learning. That's why Congress needs to protect and continue to support programs like GEAR UP or "Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs," which Congress created in 1998.

The key word is "Early." Unlike other efforts to improve academic achievement, GEAR UP begins working with students as early as middle school. GEAR UP doesn't just help the students for a year or two; it remains actively involved in their academic lives from middle school through the first year of college. The idea is to make low-income children aware of their potential – to open their eyes to opportunities and help them perform to their maximum ability.

GEAR UP doesn't work with just a few individual students. In a truly novel approach, the program focuses on entire classes of predominantly low-income children, many of them being first generation students. GEAR UP supports these children in and outside the



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classroom, getting parents, local business partners and community organizations involved in the children's educational team.



This is a program that uses effective educational strategies and research-based program models. GEAR UP is gaining universal praise for its selectivity in building upon strategies that have already proven themselves, and for its willingness to jettison those practices that haven't served students well.

One of the things that I like most about GEAR UP is that, for once, Washington has put its faith in parents and local school systems, not bureaucrats. With GEAR UP, local schools are given the flexibility to help each child perform to his or her fullest potential. Anybody who thinks students can be taught by remote control from Washington or [State Capitol] has been outside a classroom too long. Parents, teachers, guidance counselors and principals alike, desperately need for bureaucratic strings to be cut so our children can learn. This job has provided me with many opportunities to meet our local educators: the dedicated people who care about our students and who achieve miracles every day. What they need are adequate tools, not second-guessing from politicians and remote government agencies.

If children are to truly enhance their academic performance, however, it will take more than just parents and teachers, guidance counselors and principals. This is a big job, and it takes a team to finish it: extended family, business and community groups, places of worship, virtually everybody who comes in contact with a youngster has to help set the framework, encourage him or her to aim high, and then be willing to help these students to achieve their dreams.

That's what is so unique about GEAR UP—it brings everybody to the table in the service of student achievement. GEAR UP recognizes that, if every child has the right to a quality education, none of us can afford to stand aside. Each one of us should get involved — no exceptions, no excuses. By bringing together community resources, families and educators, GEAR UP has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of our children. It already does so for more than 580 thousand youngsters all across America.

I encourage you to urge your Members of Congress to work together to find a balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not jeopardize the future prosperity of our country by cutting bipartisan, national priorities, which strengthen our communities and support economic growth. Programs such as GEAR UP really make a difference for low-income, minority and disadvantaged students in our communities, and each of us—elected officials, businesspeople, teachers, parents and community members—needs to “gear up” to provide our children a brighter future.

The author is the GEAR UP Director in [Your Grant Name here] in [Your State Here].

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