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## What a great IDEA: Advocate at the national, state and local level

*By Mary Beth Klotz and Libby Nealis\**

With the provisions of IDEA 2004 going into effect on July 1, and the draft regulations currently being reviewed by the public, it is a crucial time for school psychologists to get involved with advocacy efforts. The **National Association of School Psychologists** has worked hard throughout the reauthorization process advocating for regulatory language that will improve the lives of children with disabilities, as well as to promote public awareness of the important contributions school psychologists make in schools.

School psychologists can and should play an active role in the advocacy process in order to influence the regulations and policies that will shape professional practice for years to come.

### **The power of coalitions**

Working with coalitions is an excellent way to increase your influence with policy makers and to strengthen the impact of your efforts to shape public policy. Collaborating with colleagues from the larger education and service provider community permits you to increase your credibility and reach a larger audience. On a national level, NASP's coalition groups include the **LD Roundtable**, the **Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities**, the **Mental Health Liaison Group** and the **National Alliance of Pupil Services Organizations**.

NASP submitted joint recommendations for IDEA regulations to OSERS with its coalition partners during the first public comment period that ended February 28, 2005. NASP staff, along with coalition representatives, met with OSERS staff to discuss these recommendations and provide input for the regulations. In response to the draft regulations that were released on June 10<sup>th</sup>, NASP is again in the process of developing its own as well as joint recommendations with coalition groups

### **Get associations involved**

Forming strategic coalition groups, drafting joint recommendations and meeting with policymakers are key advocacy steps for school psychologists working at the state and local levels. This is a key time for state school psychology associations and school psychologists to develop plans to provide comments to policymakers who are crafting state regulations, and to local administrators who are revising policies in accordance with IDEA 2004.

Some state association leaders have already formed coalition groups that emulate the advocacy efforts of national coalitions such as the LD Roundtable. By organizing cross-stakeholder coalitions to

make recommendations on important issues — such as revised state and local policies for the identification of learning disabilities — school psychologists can play a critical and proactive role in policy development.

### **Take advantage of advocacy opportunities**

The IDEA 2004 regulatory process offers an important and valuable opportunity to:

- Educate school psychology association members.
- Educate state policymakers.
- Build coalitions.
- Disseminate information.

Some key components of this effort may include:

- Targeting state policymakers to contact and influence elected officials.
- Getting school psychologists on official state and local advisory boards, committees and task forces.
- Becoming involved or strengthening relationships with other professional, parent advocacy and public/consumer organizations.
- Organizing and participating in coalitions of services providers and other educational, mental health, and children's services groups.
- Assisting each other and enlisting support of other groups in policy and legislative concerns of mutual interest.

The reauthorization of IDEA has brought about many changes that will affect the practice of school psychology and the services offered to students with disabilities. The reauthorization process affords school psychologists the opportunity to enhance the lives of children and their families by advocating for policies that support mental health services and improved achievement for all students.

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Sidebar:

### **NASP advocacy resources**

The following resources on public policy and advocacy are provided by the **National Association of School Psychologists**. Follow the links for more information:

Check the advocacy, public policy, and legislative issues page of the NASP Web site for the latest information on policy issues — [www.nasponline.org/advocacy](http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy).

NASP IDEA Information webpage for legislative text, legislative updates, extensive references, reports, recommendations for regulations and weblinks. — [nasponline.org/advocacy/IDEAinformation.html](http://nasponline.org/advocacy/IDEAinformation.html). Also visit the Special Ed Connection Web site for the latest news and resources on the new IDEA at [www.specialedconnection.com](http://www.specialedconnection.com)

NASP member services at [www.naspwebservices.org](http://www.naspwebservices.org) provides strategies, tools and resources for advocating at the national, state, and local level to:

- Advocacy of school psychology role and practices.
- Advocacy with key stakeholder groups.
- Advocacy for the needs of children, families.
- Advocacy to shape legislative outcomes.

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