



## Positive School Climate, Student Wellness, and Improved Academic Outcomes: Bringing Out the Best in Students and Schools *Legislative Priorities*

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) believes that achieving excellence in education for the 21st century requires that every student is ready and able to learn, and every teacher is empowered to teach. The key factors contributing to these goals relate to variables influencing student wellness, a school's climate, and the capacity of schools and families to partner for student learning and success.

NASP has outlined our guiding principles for educational reform in our founding public policy document, ***Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach: Excellence in Education for the 21st Century***. These guiding principles address several critical needs facing schools today including the needs for:

- high expectations for all students
- personalized educational environments that promote student–family–school connectedness
- accountability systems that value and promote a whole child's development and success
- instructional and professional excellence
- effective leadership for all student support programs
- adequate resources and funding of schools to promote optimal learning

The policy objectives outlined below and in ***Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach*** support all aspects of positive schooling and should be considered foundational for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Additionally, the guiding principles and key policy objectives of ***Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach*** link to a variety of legislative proposals currently introduced in the 111th Congress.

### Key Policy Objectives

**School Climate**—Positive school climate correlates with high student achievement and student engagement, and often includes school safety, positive behavioral supports, bullying prevention, extracurricular programming, and crisis prevention and response.

**Key Policy Objectives:** *Ensure that instruction, assessment, and interventions are responsive to students' individual backgrounds and circumstances, including culture and language. Expand accountability systems to include school climate, student wellness, and family–school partnerships. Extend supports to include high quality early childhood and after-school programming for at-risk children and youth. Provide full funding for educational mandates such as IDEA and ESEA.*

**Promoting Student Wellness**—Supporting students' social, emotional, and behavioral health through a positive strengths-based and skill-building approach improves resiliency, optimism, and competence.

**Key Policy Objectives:** *Create smaller classrooms and improved student–staff ratios. Ensure access for all children to support services to address the spectrum of barriers caused by health, behavioral, psychological, and environmental problems that can prevent students from being ready and able to learn. Provide sufficient specialized instructional support personnel to lower barriers and meet the needs of the whole child in order to promote healthy learning and development by ensuring each child access to a full continuum of services.*

**School Connectedness and Family–School Partnerships**—Schools that form positive partnerships with families increase school connectedness and student achievement.

***Key Policy Objectives:** Provide sufficient student support services and personnel to meet the needs of the whole child in order to promote healthy learning and development by coordinating services across a continuum of care that integrates schools, families, and community providers. Include rates and effectiveness of home–school–community collaboration as part of school accountability measures. Provide federal leadership for advancing specialized instructional and student support services.*

## **Connections to 111th Congress Proposed Legislation**

### **Increased Student Achievement Through Increased Student Support Act H.R. 1361, S. 538**

- Awards grants for partnerships between low-income local education agencies (LEAs) and schools offering graduate programs in school psychology, school counseling, and school social work to increase the number of program graduates employed and retained by low-income LEAs.

### **Reducing Barriers to Learning Act H.R. 3800**

- Establishes an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services in the Department of Education and provides grants to state education agencies to provide leadership and supports to reduce barriers to learning, including any social, emotional, behavioral, physical, environmental, or academic factors that substantially interfere with a student's ability to achieve academically.

### **Mental Health in Schools Act H.R. 2531**

- Develops ways to assist children in coping with violence by providing comprehensive services and supports and incorporating positive behavioral interventions and supports.

### **Safe Schools Improvement Act H.R. 2262**

- Amends the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act to include bullying and harassment prevention programs.

### **Positive Behavior for Safe and Effective Schools Act H.R. 2597**

- Amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 to increase implementation of school-wide positive behavioral supports.

### **Bullying and Gang Reduction for Improved Education Act H.R. 1589**

- Amends the ESEA of 1965 to add bullying and gang prevention to the violence and drug abuse prevention activities.

### **Child Health Care Crisis Relief Act of 2009 H.R. 1932, S.999**

- Establishes programs related to increasing the provision of a full continuum of mental health services for children and adolescents.

## **Other Legislation Under Development**

Many elected leaders are currently working on legislation that would also support these priorities. Legislation addressing innovative partnerships between schools and communities, conditions for ensuring that students are not harmed by the use of seclusion and restraint in schools, and policies that promote appropriate disaster relief services for children is currently in the development phase. NASP supports continued work in these areas and applauds the senators and representatives that have joined us by promoting policies to ensure that all children are able to succeed in school, at home, and in life.

For more information on NASP policy priorities and to download *Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach*, visit [www.nasponline.org/advocacy](http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy). See other briefing handouts for key concepts and research. © 2009 National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814—(301) 657-0270.