2012 PPI Capitol Hill Visits
Legislative Talking Points

In preparation for the Capitol Hill Day

1. Review the actual bill text for the following bills and determine if your elected officials have signed on as sponsors. These are available in your downloadable materials or at the Library of Congress: www.thomas.loc.gov.

SENATE:
S 919 Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students Act of 2011
S541 Achievement through Prevention Act
S 506 Safe Schools Improvement Act

HOUSE:
HR 1648 Safe Schools Improvement Act
HR 3165 Positive Behavior for Safe and Effective Schools
HR 751 Mental Health in the Schools Act
HR 2437 Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011
HR 3169 Student Support Act
HR 3405 Increased Student Achievement Through Increased Student Support

2. For each bill, look at the Legislative Priorities sheet (in the excel format) and see if your Senator/Representatives has signed on. This also has a very brief description of the bill.
   - IF your elected official is a sponsor, THANK them for their support of this bill when it comes up in conversation.
   - IF your elected official is NOT a sponsor, ask them if they would be willing to review and consider cosponsoring the bill.

3. Look at the sheet that lists the members of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pension. Is your elected official on either one of these committees? If so, you can also always ask them to request that a hearing on these issues and the associated bills take place.

4. Don’t worry about the fine details in a bill. There are two things you should take away from each bill: 1) How does the bill propose to address a specific issue? 2) How much is it expected to cost?

5. Most of the time your conversations will really be more about issues, not specific legislation. However, it they ask—you have the information at your finger tips.

Setting the Stage for Advocacy:

o Thank the legislative assistant/Congressman/Senator for taking the time to visit with you.

o Introduce yourself and each person in your group and provide a brief statement about your background working in schools or your interest in education.

o Be sure and have the constituents in your group clearly identify themselves.

o Ask the elected official if he or she knows any school psychologists or other school employed mental health professionals like school counselors or school social workers? Offer some basic information for them about the role of school psychologists and the importance of our work in creating safe and supportive conditions for learning. Feel free to share anecdotal comments throughout the meeting.

o Focus on the broad role of a school psychologist including assessment, prevention, intervention, and consultation services. There is information in their packet that explains what a school psychologist does and how we coordinate with others to provide comprehensive learning supports.

o Please emphasize the need for all school-employed mental health professionals in schools: school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and school nurses. There is plenty of work for all of us and the best services are delivered when we work collaboratively together. It is also important to emphasize the importance of families having access to more intensive community based therapeutic interventions before and after school that are fully coordinated with school employed personnel.

o If a staff person asks you a question you don’t know the answer to, do not worry about it. It happens all of the time. Simply reply that you are “not sure, but you can find out” and ask if it is OK to get back to them. After your meeting, talk to one of the organizers of the Public Policy Institute and we’ll tell you how to follow up and direct you to any additional resources that might be of assistance.
**Key Talking Points:**

1) **INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM:**

We are here to ask for your help in creating policies that promote safe and supportive conditions for learning. School environments that are safe, prevent negative behaviors, foster increased student engagement, support students’ social-emotional wellness and mental health, and encourage positive behavior are necessary to help students achieve to their fullest potential. Unfortunately, student learning and mental health supports are given marginal attention and too often, students struggle in meeting their academic potential, or fail to complete school due to the lack of adequate learning supports to help them overcome barriers to learning. We are especially interested in promoting policies that help all students achieve better outcomes in school. The areas where we would like to see improvements made to public policies, and specifically the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, include:

- **Promote School Environments that are Conducive to Learning and Responsible Behavior:** Supportive school environments that promote school connectedness, prevent negative behaviors, and proactively teach and reinforce positive behaviors and social skills.

- **Provide Sufficient Access to Learning and Mental Health Services and Supports.** Learning supports are essential to student success. Comprehensive and coordinated learning supports directly contribute to more positive student outcomes and increased academic achievement. Policies, as well as funding, that improve student access to specialized instructional support personnel who provide and coordinate learning, health, and mental health services and supports can help ensure that all students needs are identified and met.

- **Promote safe school environments for all students that are free of bullying and harassment.** 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. Policies need to promote the practice of tracking variables that reflect a schools climate and intentionally implementing programs and supports that promote positive school climates for student success.

**A. Promote School Environments that are Conducive to Learning and Responsible Behavior.** School-wide programs that prevent negative behaviors and increase school safety are central to creating safe and supportive conditions for learning.

**Key Policy Objectives:**

1) Encourage school districts to implement school wide programs, problem-solving processes, and prevention and intervention services embedded in multi-tiered systems of support (i.e. response to intervention and positive behavior interventions and support.)

2) Encourage policies that provide funds to train teachers and school staff in classroom instruction and school-wide initiatives that enable students to acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills conducive to social and emotional competency.

3) Encourage states and school districts to routinely measure conditions for learning by surveying students and staff and incorporating those results into comprehensive school improvement plans.

**B. Provide Sufficient Access to Learning and Mental Health Services and Supports.** ESEA needs to explicitly promote policies and funding that improve student access to specialized instructional support personnel who can provide the learning and mental health services, supports, and leadership to ensure that student needs are identified and responded to.

**Key Policy Objectives:**

1) Provide sufficient student support services and access to qualified school and community personnel to meet the needs of students and 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.

2) Encourage policies that establish programs fostering supportive relationships between students in transition and caring adults (e.g., mentoring, educational liaisons, educational advocates, specific program coordinators).

3) Provide federal leadership for addressing barriers to learning and advancing specialized instructional and student support services.

**C. Promote safe school environments for all students that are free of bullying and harassment.** Policies need to promote the practice of tracking variables that reflect a school’s climate and intentional implementation of evidenced based programs and supports that ensure that all students feel safe and supported in school.
Key Policy Objectives:

1) Ensure that instruction, assessment, and interventions are responsive to students’ individual backgrounds and circumstances, including culture and language.

2) Encourage policies that require schools to specifically prohibit bullying and harassment, including conduct based on a student’s actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or religion.

3) Encourage policies that help schools and school districts implement evidence based school wide bullying prevention programs, including professional development on how to identify and respond to incidents of bullying.

2) EXPLAINING THE PROBLEM WITH RESEARCH SUPPORTS

Safe and supportive conditions for learning are essential to school success and are associated with more positive academic and social outcomes for students.

Safe, supportive conditions for learning are essential to school success.

- Changing a school’s climate and connectedness for the better is associated with significant increases in reading, writing, and math, regardless of whether a school starts with high or low school climate and connectedness or high or low achievement scores (Spier et al., 2007; Spier et al., 2007)
- Interventions that strengthen students’ social, emotional, and decision-making skills also positively impact their academic achievement both in terms of higher standardized test scores and better grades (Fleming et al., 2005).
- Interventions that promote students’ bonding to school contribute to positive outcomes in terms of academic performance and social competence, while reducing tobacco, alcohol, and drug use; criminal involvement; gang membership; and school dropout (Catalano et al., 2004).

School-wide programs that prevent negative behaviors increase school safety and are central to positive conditions for learning.

- Witnessing or experiencing school violence diminishes student well-being and motivation, and leads to increased risk of aggression, school avoidance, and dislike of school. Truancy and decreased school engagement resulting from school violence are largely attributed to students feeling unsafe (Janosz et al., 2008).
- In 2011, 5.9% of high school students reported that they missed at least one day of school in the previous month because they felt unsafe at or on their way to and from school (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).
- Whole school interventions using positive behavior support have been shown to decrease behavior problems while improving academic performance, as measured by standardized tests in reading and math (Luisili, et al., 2005)

Bullying prevention policies and integrated prevention programs are necessary for student success.

- 70-80% of school-aged students have been involved in bullying at some point during their school years (Graham, 2011).
- Frequent exposure to victimization or bullying others is associated with high risks of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts; even infrequent involvement in bullying behavior is related to increased risk of depression and suicidality, particularly among girls (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007).
- School-wide interventions are more likely to positively impact school climate and reduce bullying than individualized or classroom interventions implemented in isolation (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007).

Having adequate access to adults who can help them resolve problems before they become a barrier to student success (access to school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, etc.). Before the economy tanked, there was a national shortage of school mental health positions and personnel (school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers). These are the professionals that work to provide comprehensive learning and mental health supports for students, often lead positive behavior intervention and support programs, social emotional learning programs, and school violence reduction programs.

- The impact of promotion and prevention interventions is at least two to three times higher when programs are carefully implemented by qualified personnel who have expert knowledge of the relevant issues being addressed (Durlak & Dupre, 2008).
- Empirical evidence demonstrates that services provided by school psychologists can have a significant, positive impact on students’ academic achievement (Goodman & Young, 2006).
- School counseling practices have been shown to improve students’ social skills, and school social work services have been shown to be cost-effective in reducing problem behaviors and school exclusion (Whiston & Sexton, 1998; Bagley & Pritchard, 1998).
WHAT TO DO TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM: OUR KEY MESSAGES:

- Ask for their support of legislation that examines the necessary “conditions for learning” and provides federal grant money to develop the capacity of schools to provide learning supports (including school mental health supports, specialized instructional support services, etc.) for students.

SENATE
   S 919 Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students Act of 2011
   S 541 Achievement through Prevention Act

HOUSE
   HR 751 Mental Health in the Schools Act
   HR 2437 Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011
   A version of S 919 is expected to be introduced in the House this summer. They may contact Congressman Kind for further information.

- Ask for their support of legislation that requires states develop anti-bullying policies, provide professional developing in identifying and responding to bullying, and to keep track of the number of bullying and harassment incidents so that schools can gain a better awareness of the scope of the problem and the need for proactive policies and interventions. The most important bill that has been introduced in the 112th Congress that specifically addresses bullying and harassment in schools:

HOUSE
   HR 1648 Safe Schools Improvement Act

SENATE
   S 506 Safe Schools Improvement Act

- Ask for their support of legislation that promotes the use of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports in schools. The primary bills of interest here are:

SENATE
   S 541 Achievement through Prevention Act

HOUSE
   HR 3165 Positive Behavior for Effective Schools.

- Ask for their support of legislation that helps make school-employed mental health professionals more accessible to children in need.

HOUSE
   HR 3169 Student Support Act
   HR 3405 Increased Student Achievement through Increased Student Support Act

CLOSING:
1. Ask if the legislative assistant/elected official has any questions.
2. Ask what their general perception of these proposals and requests are and if they think that their boss can support these issues.
3. Offer to provide future input if needed. (Follow up as requested.)
4. Thank them for their time and attention to your issues.