2013 Fall
Legislative Talking Points

Fall is a great time to meet with your Senators and Representatives in their home state and district. Your elected officials want, and need to hear from you, so that they can take your thoughts, concerns, suggestions, data, and personal stories back to Washington to help influence public policies that will ensure that all students have access to the academic, behavioral, social, emotional, and mental health supports they need to be successful in school. This document is intended to be a guide to help you plan your meeting with your Senator or your Congressman. Included are basic tips for advocacy, relevant NASP documents that you may want to share, key talking points, and research that supports these policy ideas. At the end of the document, there are specific pieces of legislation being considered in Congress that NASP is supporting. It is not necessary for you to focus on technical details, but rather the broad themes addressed in the various bills. The legislation referenced in this document refers specifically to bills in Congress; however, the general talking points can be used when meeting with your state and local elected officials.

Setting the Stage for Advocacy: The Basics

- Thank the legislative assistant/Congressman/Senator for taking the time to visit with you.
- Introduce yourself and provide a brief statement about your background working in schools or your interest in education.
- Offer some basic information for them about the role of school psychologists and the importance of our work in supporting student behavior and learning. Feel free to sprinkle anecdotal comments throughout the meeting.
- Focus on the broad role of a school psychologist including, prevention, intervention, and consultation services with school staff and families. There is information in their packet that explains what a school psychologist does and how we coordinate with others to provide comprehensive learning supports that help students achieve their best.
- Emphasize the need for all school-employed mental health professionals in schools: school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and school nurses. The needs of students and families are best met when we work together collaboratively. 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.
- Do not worry about the details of a piece of legislation; focus on the broader issues.
- 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 okay to get back to them. NASP can help you with any follow up information you need.

Relevant NASP Documents

It would be helpful to provide your elected officials or their staff person with either a hard or electronic copy of the most relevant NASP documents. If your state association or local school district has created relevant policy documents, share those as well.

- Framework for Safe and Successful Schools
- Framework for School-wide Bullying Prevention and Safety
- Research on School Security: The Impact of Security Measures on Students
- School Psychologists: Improving Student and School Outcomes

Talking Points

_Do not feel that you have to cover all of these talking points; these are intended to simply be a guide. You may pick one or two that are most relevant to your interests and the needs of your state and district._

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. We are especially interested in promoting policies that help all students achieve better outcomes in school. The areas where we would like to see public policies that address the following:

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

**Effective School-wide Discipline Policies and Practices.** Schools must have discipline policies and practices that are positive, fair, consistently implemented, and are designed to keep students in the classroom. We need to move away from the implementation of ineffective zero tolerance policies and unnecessary suspensions and expulsions.

1) Prohibit the use of zero tolerance policies except in cases that directly violate the Gun Free Schools Act.

2) Increase the implementation of initiatives such as positive behavioral supports and/or restorative justice to keep students in school out of jail.

3) Increase collaboration between the school, law enforcement, juvenile justice, and social services.

**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.

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.

**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.

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.

**Legislative Priorities**

Text of these bills can be found at thomas.loc.gov. It is not necessary to talk about the specifics of the legislation. However, if you are asked if there are any bills that address the policies discussed above, you can reference these bills.

When meeting with your SENATOR:

- Ask them to support S1094 Strengthening America’s Schools Act.
This bill was recently voted out of the Senate HELP committee and is intended to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This bill addresses all of NASP’s legislative priorities and focuses on the importance providing learning supports to all students.

- **Ask them to support S. 689 Mental Health Awareness And Improvement Act of 2013** This bill garnered unanimous support when it was introduced as an amendment to the gun control legislation. Encourage your Senator to support this bill as a piece of stand-alone legislation. This bill would allow schools to use Title 1 funds to expand positive behavior interventions and supports, and would increase access to mental health supports in the schools.

- **Ask them to support S 403 Safe Schools Improvement Act** This bill would require that all school districts have an enumerated anti-bullying policy and would help ensure that all students attend school in an environment free of bullying and harassment.

When meeting with your REPRESENTATIVE:

- **Ask them to support HR 1854 Partnerships for Achieving Student Success Act** This bill would help alleviate the shortage of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers in high needs areas.

- **Ask them to support HR 1199 Safe Schools Improvement Act** This bill would require that all school districts have an enumerated anti-bullying policy and would help ensure that all students attend school in an environment free of bullying and harassment.

**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.