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 can be found on your CD Rom 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
- S571 Educational Success for Children without Homes Act

HOUSE:
- HR 1995 Reducing Barriers to Learning Act of 2011
- HR 1648 Safe Schools Improvement Act
- HR 1253 Educational Success for Children without Homes Act
- HR XXX Positive Behavior for Effective Schools
- HR 751Mental Health in the Schools Act
- HRXXX & SXXX Increased Student Achievement through Increased Student Support Act
  - In the 211th Congress, this bill was introduced in both the House and the Senate. It is expected to be reintroduced in the 212th although it hasn’t been yet. We anticipate that Senator Pryor will introduce it in the Senate and Representative Towns will in the House.

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 co sponsoring the bill.

3. Look at the sheet that details the list of Education committee members for the House and the Senate in your handouts. Is your elected official on the Ed committee in the HOUSE or SENATE? If so, you can also always ask them to request that a hearing on these issues and the associated bills to 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) what is the bill generally proposing be done to address an 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:

- Thank the legislative assistant/congressman/senator for making the time to visit with you today.
- Introduce yourself and each person in your group and provide a brief statement about your background working in schools.
- Be sure and have the constituents in your group clearly identify themselves.
- 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 removing barriers to learning. Feel free to share anecdotal comments throughout the meeting.
- Focus on the broad role of a school psychologist including assessment, intervention, and consultation services. There is a brochure in their packet that explains what a school psychologist does and how we coordinate with others to provide comprehensive learning supports.
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 personnel.

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 let 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 sufficient access to learning supports for vulnerable students--students at risk for school failure. Too many students fail to complete school every year because they struggle with disabilities or don’t have adequate supports to overcome the barriers they are encounter because of family transitions or struggles. We are especially interested in promoting policies that help these students experience 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/NCLB, include:

- **Promote Educational Stability**: Promote educational stability for vulnerable youth. (Youth at risk for school failure due to difficult family transitions, disabilities, health or mental health risk factors, etc.)
- **Explicitly Recognize the Needs of Students in Transition**: Explicitly recognition of the needs of students in transition by creating needs assessments and student monitoring systems so that students who are highly mobile can receive needed learning supports and stay engaged in school even when moving from one school district to another.
- **Provide Sufficient Access to Learning and Mental Health Services and Supports.** Help provide better access to learning, health, and mental health services and supports that can help these vulnerable student cope with the challenges that they encounter due to their life transition.
- **Promote positive school environments that are conducive to learning and 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 Educational Stability. Students experiencing significant life transitions benefit from policies that provide consistency of educational experiences, expectations, opportunities, and educational stability.

*Key Policy Objectives:*

1) Permit students to “stay put” in schools whenever feasible and appropriate for the student.
2) Encourage school districts to adopt policies and practices that seek out, identify, and support students in transition that may be in need of learning and mental health supports.
3) Permit student progress towards graduation and promotion in one district to carry to a new district when the student is required to move.
4) Require districts to adopt policies that explicitly recognize and address the needs of students in transition and the importance of providing learning supports.
B. Explicitly Recognize the Needs of Students in Transition. ESEA needs to explicitly address the needs of children in transition by requiring schools to monitor supports to students and providing funding for support programs and services to improve student educational outcomes.

**Key Policy Objectives:**
1) Explicitly include in ESEA a definition of “students in transition” and reference to the needs of these populations.
2) Incorporate into ESEA the policies and associated educational practices laid out in the Social Security Act, “Fostering Connections to Success Act” adopted by Congress in 2008.
3) Explicitly incorporate into ESEA the policies and practices outlined in the Department of Defense’s “Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children”.
4) Require districts to annually report the frequency of students in need of these programs, efforts to meet student need, and any associated student outcomes.
5) Adopt policies and practices that expedite the transmittal of educational records when students in transition are required to switch schools.

C. 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 personnel to meet the needs of students in transition 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.
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.

D. Promote positive school environments that are conducive to learning and 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.

**Key Policy Objectives:**
1) Ensure that instruction, assessment, and interventions are responsive to students’ individual backgrounds and circumstances, including culture and language.
2) Expand accountability systems to include school climate, student wellness, and family–school partnerships.
3) Extend supports to include high quality early childhood and after-school programming for at-risk children and youth.

2) EXPLAINING THE PROBLEM WITH RESEARCH SUPPORTS

Some of the major problems that students are struggling with in school that create barriers to learning and student success include:

1. Managing stress, anxiety, and family demands related to family issues like the economic stressors related to our economy (parent job loss, foreclosure on homes, older kids
needing to provide care to younger siblings while parents work overtime to generate more money, etc.)

- Homeless children are twice as likely as other children to repeat a grade in school, to be expelled or suspended, or to drop out of school, and their estimated high school graduation rate is less than 25% (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009).
- Many homeless children are unable to attend school consistently because they constantly move to find shelter, lack the records needed for school enrollment, do not have transportation, or are ashamed of their situation (Hicks-Coolick, A., Burnside-Eaton, P., & Peters, A. (2003); Morris, R. I., & Butt, R. A. (2003))

2. Managing stress, anxiety, fear or grief and loss associated with parents who are in the military and have been deployed overseas.

- About 1.35% of the 1.96 million military dependents attended Department of Defense Educational Activity schools in the United States in 2009 suggesting that an overwhelming majority of military dependents in the United States attend public schools. (U.S. Department of Education, DODEA Data Center)
- A parent’s deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan has potentially long-term adverse effects on a child’s standardized test scores in most academic subjects, with the most detrimental effects occurring during the actual deployment (Engel, R. C., Gallagher, L. B., & Lyle, D. S., 2010)

3. Dealing with bullying and harassment (on playgrounds, lunchrooms, buses, cyber bullying, etc.). Students with disabilities or those that are struggling with personal problems (like the family losing their home) are often targets for teasing, bullying and harassment.

- In 2005, 65% of teens were verbally or physically harassed or assaulted because of their appearance, sexual orientation, gender, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion (Harris Interactive, Inc., 2005).
- The same survey revealed that 53% of teachers see bullying and harassment of students as a serious problem at their school (Harris Interactive, Inc., 2005).
- 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).

4. 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.). With the tightening economies, many schools are cutting personnel and these professionals are often cut before classroom teachers and other direct instructional staff.

Before the economy every 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. School counselors report that they currently have a national average of 1 school counselor to every 475 students is nearly double their maximum recommended ratio of 1 school counselor to every 250 students. School psychologists report a similar trend with the national average exceeding 1 school psychologist for every 1400 students, which is nearly three times the national recommended ratio of 500-700 students for every school psychologist engaged in the provision of quality school psychological services including prevention, intervention, assessment, and consultation. Two main bills have been introduced that address this need:

3) 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 provide learning supports (including school mental health supports, specialized instructional support services, etc.) for students. The Reducing Barriers to Learning Act in the House also addresses the need for improved federal leadership in this area.
SENATE
S 919 Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students Act of 2011
S 541 Achievement through Prevention Act

HOUSE
HR 1995 Reducing Barriers to Learning Act
HR 751 Mental Health in the Schools Act

- Ask for their support of legislation that requires states 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 XXX Positive Behavior for Effective Schools. (Expected to be introduced this week by Rep. Davis (IL-7)

- Ask for their support of legislation that helps promote educational stability for vulnerable student populations/students in transition such as homeless students, foster children, or children living in military families. Current legislation that addresses part of this issue includes:

SENATE
S 571 Educational Success for Children without Homes Act

HOUSE
HR 1253 Educational Success for Children without Homes Act

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

The best bill for this is the INCREASED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT through INCREASED STUDENT SUPPORT ACT. This bill has not yet been reintroduced but we encourage them to contact Rep. Towns (in the HOUSE) and Senator Pryor (in the Senate) to find out the status of this bill’s reintroduction and to sign on as a cosponsor once it is introduced.

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.