



Legislative Committee Update

August, 2004

Submitted by John Boyle, Chair

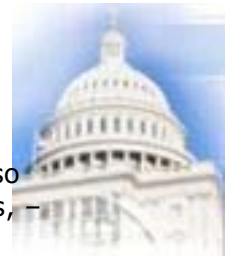
The Legislative Committee started a new emphasis on getting involved in the Iowa legislative process during the fall of 2003. This emphasis began with the development of a 16-page Legislative Handbook that is packed with important information related to being aware of the political process and how to be an effective advocate for education and school psychology. Many were able to pick up the booklet at last year's conference and they have also been given to lead psychologists. The booklet was developed with Microsoft Word and can be easily opened and printed. Please let me know if you are interested in a copy of the booklet (e-mail or printed) and I will forward it.

One reason the Legislative Handbook is so important is that ISPA has created a **Legislative Network** of school psychologists for the purpose of dissemination of information and to serve as a communication tool for the Association and its members. Members of this Network are asked to make contact with their legislators as an introduction and to follow up with them as needed for related legislation or explanation of the role of a school psychologist. Don't worry - the Handbook has examples of letters and ways to communicate with legislators. Members of the Network are able to receive informative updates related to Legislative activity. Your help in making this network a success is needed:

- There are 100 House and 50 Senate districts in the Iowa Legislature and ISPA is **seeking volunteers from each District** to serve as a contact. **YOU** can help by **volunteering**.
- To date we have been successful in locating volunteers to represent only **12** Senate Districts and **15** House Districts. The committee will be making a concerted effort this fall to locate a liaison for each district in both Houses of the Legislature.
- If you are unaware of your district and the names of your legislators - you can obtain this information at the Legislative website: www.legis.state.ia.us. Click on "Find Your Legislator" under Popular Links, type in your address and you will get a listing of state and federal legislators.
- E-mail the names and district numbers of your legislators to John Boyle at jikboyle@mchsi.com and I will forward the next set of information.
- The Senate Districts for which we currently have contacts are: **20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 39, 43, 45, 46, and 48**. House Districts with currently with contacts assigned are: **7, 8, 38, 39, 40, 43, 45, 51, 60, 87, 89, 92, and 96**.
- Our goal is to have every district covered by the end of November so liaisons can begin to make contact with their elected officials prior to the start of the legislative session in January.

Additional Legislative/Public Policy Activities:

- In late June, I attended a 3-day Public Policy Institute sponsored by NASP in Washington, DC. ISPA sponsored my attendance at this event. The Institute involved two days of training on current federal legislation effecting school psychology and education, and NASP's legislative agenda for 2004-05. We also received practice in the "art" of communicating with legislators and their staffs, - skills utilized during visits to Capitol Hill on the last day of the Institute. Unfortunately, Congress was in early recess for the July 4th holiday so I was not able to meet directly with Senators or my Congressman (Leonard Boswell - 3rd District), but I was able to meet legislative assistants for educational and mental health issues in all three offices. I received a very favorable response from all three offices as I described the field of school psychology in Iowa; and how students and families benefit from our services. Each Congressional office made a commitment to remain in contact with me regarding educational and mental health issues that may be of interest to Iowa and to allow me to seek feedback from Iowa school psychologists as the Senator or Congressman make their decisions.
- While visiting in Senator Tom Harkin's office I was informed by his staff of a new piece of legislation the Senator introduced in early July which would be of importance to school psychology. The bill, entitled the **Healthy Lifestyles and Prevention (HeLP) America Act**, addresses various aspects of a healthy lifestyle (healthy school food program, prevention services, research, safe living environments) and those of importance to school psychology -



grant programs for mental health services in the schools and data collection programs on mental and behavioral health status and risk factors. Senator Harkin is in the process of seeking co-sponsors for his legislation. This appears to be a good piece of legislation for school psychologists to support.

- As an outgrowth of my contacts in Senator Harkin's office, I was invited to attend the Polk County Focus Group on the HeLP Bill in mid-July. I was asked to speak about the presence of mental health services in the schools and the need for additional types of services, personnel, and funds to support activities. From my understanding, the Senator's staff held such a forum in each of the 99 Iowa counties. Invitations were sent to many local agencies – hospitals, YMCA, insurance companies, etc. – so school psychologists in your location may not have heard of the forums – I only knew through a phone call from the Senator's staff. As the group from Polk County met, most of the discussion was related to wellness programs (exercise, weight loss, smoking cessation) supported by the large organizations present. I am glad that I was able to be present as I was the only one to address any aspect of mental health or educational services in the schools. If you hear of such a forum in your area, please attend – I can get you some brief talking points.

As issues related to legislative/public policy matters come about this year information will be presented to ISPA members through the newsletter, e-mails, and a planned Legislative Page on the ISPA website. For additional information, to volunteer, or to make a comment – get in touch with John at jjkboyle@mchsi.com or 515-965-3822.