

**West Virginia Advocacy/Legislative Priorities**  
**By Beverly Winter, NASP Delegate**

As a result of attending the Public Policy Institute 2007 this summer, I am charged with giving NASP and WVSPA feedback so that our state can plan to promote advocacy for our profession and any promotion of other government and professional issues we have.

I have some thoughts that follow in this article. However, I need your feedback about my initial thoughts. Please contact me at [bevwinter@suddenlink.net](mailto:bevwinter@suddenlink.net) for feedback, suggestions, or concerns you have regarding my ideas.

I have posted some information on the WVSPA website that is discussed in this article [www.wvspa.org/](http://www.wvspa.org/).

**What we have already in place**

We have government and professional relations in our strategic plan, which is on the WVSPA website for your review. Please look at the strategic plan, and give feedback to Susan Beck or Karen Edgell.

Also on the WVSPA website are links to the WV Senate and WV House of Representatives. You can locate your local representative, and email him/her from that web link. The web link is hyperlinked, so all you have to do is go to the WVSPA website.

I have added the legislative equivalent for the federal level (capwiz) on the WVSPA website. The web link is hyperlinked as well. In addition, there are sample letters you can use, amend, or you can write your own from that web link site.

WHEN YOU COMMUNICATE WITH FEDERAL LEVEL REPRESENTATIVES, YOU MUST EMAIL OR FAX YOUR CORRESPONDENCE. IT CAN TAKE TWO TO THREE WEEKS FOR MAIL TO BE DELIVERED. THE MAIL IS X-RAYED ALONG WITH OTHER WAYS TO MAKE SURE THAT THE MAIL IS SAFE TO BE DELIVERED. THIS IS TIME CONSUMING AND THE SUBSEQUENT PAPERWORK IS OFTEN PARCHED FROM THE PROCESSES THE MAIL IS PUT THROUGH TO INSURE THE SAFETY.

Also on the WVSPA Website is the web link to address the APA Model Licensure Act, set up the same way that the capwiz program works. The web link is hyperlinked as well.

**What do we need to do now?**

*Partnership with others*

We need to develop coalitions with other professional groups. For example, other service providers such as school counselors, school nurses, social workers, speech/language therapists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists. We need to address our state and county boards of education. We need to work closely with WV Education Association and/or WV American Federation of Teachers.

*Develop a strong grassroots initiative to improve communication*

In thinking this assignment over, it appears that when some issue comes up, we have a weak communication system in place to alert everyone of any concerns or issues. Therefore, your regional representative will be contacting each county in their region to determine who works in each county, and how to contact each person. We need a current e-mail address if you will give us permission to contact you by email. Otherwise, we need some other preferred way to contact you when we have important and time limited news.

Sometimes we forget that in order to be included in the service delivery system, we must be good ambassadors of ourselves. Since we are a small number of professionals in our state, compared to other related serviced providers and teachers, we need to be actively involved in promoting how the services we provide make a difference in the lives of students, families, and school performance.

Legislation that impacts our professional lives plays out at the state level, in the legislature and at the Department of Education. It is critical that each school psychologist familiarize themselves with their state senator and/or delegate for which they are a constituent.

*Here are some ideas to consider*

Write a note to each of your school administrators, and the teachers in the schools you serve. Introduce yourself as the school psychologist and include information as to how the teachers can contact you. Brochures are available from NASP for a nominal fee regarding "What is a School Psychologist". Send the brochure along with your note to the administrator and teachers in your district.

Send a note to your county administration, along with the brochure. Notify the county administrator of School Psychology Week (see article on School Psychology Week in this newsletter).

*Working with federal senators and representatives*

Using capwiz, locate their website. Find out where their local offices are within the state. Determine when and where they will be having “town meetings”. Go to the meeting, and introduce yourself.

Don’t ask for anything the first time you meet them, simply make the contact. Tell them who you are, where you work, and what you do. Once you make the contact with the actual legislator and/or their staff, you can follow up later with your feedback and concerns.

Remember that legislators have their interests and concerns also for their state and/or districts. Ask the legislator is there is anything you can do to help him/her with their projects in your state.

Here is an important tip.....

Think of a situation in which you helped a child or a teacher in the school in your district. If you can get parental permission to use the child’s name to use in the story, that would be great. If not, then use the general story without identifying the student.

Your district senator and delegate need to hear these stories. Your federal senators and representatives need to hear them as well.

I noticed when I was at one federal senator’s office; there were pictures of children with small stories in her office. It was a great way to personalize who and what you are doing to help children, schools and families. Everyone should have a special case to talk about.

Remember, if your representative is not on an education or mental health committee, he or she will eventually vote on your issue. With those legislators, you can tie in what you do with areas they are working on committees (you will get their committees from the capwiz link). For example, one of my representatives works on veterans’ issues. I talked with him about how many West Virginians were deployed and the impact on families and children in schools. Since West Virginia does not have a military base, these families do not have the support system that other families have that live near military bases. We can help at the schools with these children, their teachers, and sometimes their families. NASP as a position paper on this subject.

THE IMPORTANT THING TO DO IS MAKE A PERSONAL CONTACT, SO THAT WHEN YOU TALK WITH THEM LATER, THEY CAN START TO RECOGNIZE YOU.

**What do we need to do in the future?**

Please provide your WVSPA regional representative with your contact information. When you are contacted, please respond to your district representatives. We have to help ourselves by being active in this process.

Write a letter to the federal representatives regarding current legislation. Check the capwiz site frequently. Remember the link on the WVSPA website.

Write a note to you state senator or representative, superintendent, principal, teachers, parents of student's you see to tell them how they are doing (focus on strengths). Let people know who you are, where to contact you, and what you can do for them. Use the NASP brochures or develop your own.

Do something in your district for School Psychology Week in November. Notify your local newspaper, your superintendent, your schools.