



HECSE Short Course: Education Policy and Politics in the Nation's Capital

January 24 – 25, 2017

Washington, D.C.

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Introduction

Part of being an effective special education leader is being an effective participant in the public policy making process. Public policy has a tremendous impact on the field of special education. That impact can be positive, negative or a mixture of both; however it is generally significant. Consider that the concept of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is in federal law and how it has driven the field. Consider that teacher evaluation structures and processes that are currently being implemented (and not without controversy) were generated by federal policy. Consider that before what is now IDEA was enacted into federal law in 1975, students with disabilities were routinely and legally prohibited from attending school. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the field of special education without the influence of federal policy.

Having a voice in the crafting of public policy that affects students with disabilities is essential for special education leaders. That voice can make the difference between a policy with a positive effect, a negative effect or no effect at all. Special educators understand what it takes to implement policy and can provide that critical feedback to policy makers. With a perspective from the field, they are likely to anticipate unanticipated consequences of policy changes.

As doctoral level practitioners, you will take your place as leaders in special education, whether by preparing tomorrow's educators, leading in a school district or state or doing research. You will be a contributor to problem solving and a source of expertise. Your leadership role extends to the public policy making arena. This short course is intended as an introduction to begin equipping you with the knowledge, desire and skill to be an effective advocate and resource in the policy making process.

Course Objectives

When students complete the course, they will have achieved the following objectives.

- Students will be able to identify the organizational structures and key players in special education-related policy making in the nation’s capital, including governmental agencies, non-profit organizations and coalitions;
- Students will be able to describe the basics of the legislative process;
- Students will be able to demonstrate the skills and knowledge needed to become effective advocates on behalf of students with disabilities, including specific considerations that address special education and equity;
- Students will be able to articulate the history, purpose and impact of HECSE.

Course Requirements

- **Assignment #1**

Before you come to Washington, research your congressional delegation. (Every member of Congress has a website.) You will have two Senators from your state and a Representative. (Feel free to include more than one representative as you may have one representative for the district your university is in and another one for your home address.) Write yourself a cheat sheet to bring with you that answers the following questions:

1. What are the names of your Senators and Representatives and the locations of their offices in Washington and near you?
2. What congressional district does your representatives represent (this will be a number, like the 6th Congressional district of South Carolina)?
3. What is the party affiliation of each member of your delegation?
4. How long has each member of the delegation been in office?
5. What committees do your Representatives serve on that might be relevant to education or disability?
6. Might you have any potential personal connections with members of your delegation (e.g. went to the same high school, neighbor of your parents)?
7. Is there anything else you learned that might assist you in being an effective advocate?

- **Assignment #2**

Be familiar with the key resources listed below. We will reference the materials in our conversations.

- **Assignment #3**

Before coming to Washington, write down what you would like to learn from this course.

- **Assignment #4**

Spend some time on the HECSE website. What did you learn? What would you like to know about HECSE? What are your thoughts about how you could contribute to HECSE’s mission?

- **Assignment #5**

Review materials related to the new law that reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act – the Every Student Succeeds Act. (Links will be provided in Washington Updates that are emailed to you and on websites noted below.) Be prepared to discuss a) provisions in the new law that are significant for students with disabilities and teacher preparation and b) decisions states that are being made with the new authority granted to them in the law and how you can make your voice heard.

- **Assignment #6**

If the teacher preparation regulations have been issued, review them and be prepared to discuss their implications for a) the shortage of special education teachers b) the impact on teacher preparation programs c) how the cost of implementation will be absorbed.

- **Assignment #7**

At the end of the course, each participant will determine an act of advocacy in the public policy arena that they will accomplish. This could be a group project. Through a list serve, course participants will share their advocacy work.

Key Resources for the Course

- Hollister, D. (May 2007). *A public policy primer*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.
<http://www.educ.msu.edu/epfp/dh/Pub%20Pol%20Primer%20FINAL%20DOC%20FOR%20WEB%206-12-07.pdf> (download and read)
- 114th Congress Directory, Second Session (2016). Bethesda, MD: Columbia Books. (will be provided at the class)
- West, J. E. & Shepherd K. G. Eds., The nexus of special education policy, practice and scholarship: higher education special educators look to the future. May, 2016. *Teacher Education and Special Education*. Vol. 39, No. 2. Podcast: (link)
- Washington Updates provided by Jane West and the links in those updates

Websites

- U.S. Department of Education <http://www.ed.gov/>
- Committee for Education Funding <http://cef.org/>
- Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Education Task Force http://www.c-c-d.org/task_forces/education/tf-education.htm
- Coalition for Teaching Quality <http://coalitionforteachingquality.org/main/index.cfm?ID=2>

- Politico <http://www.politico.com/education/> (you can sign up for free daily emails – Morning Education)
- Higher Education Consortium for Special Education <http://www.hecse.net/>

Blogs

- Diane Ravitch <http://dianeravitch.net/>
- Rick Hess <http://www.frederickhess.org/>