



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

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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 by conducting 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 be able to:

1. 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;
2. Describe the basics of the legislative process;
3. 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; and
4. Articulate the history, purpose and impact of HECSE as well as develop an understanding of how to establish and maintain relationships within the policymaking process.



Course Requirements

Assignment #1

Before coming 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). Keep in mind that your representatives may be changing due to this midterm election. 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, D.C. 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 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. Has your Senator or Representative introduced or sponsored any bills relevant to special education?
8. Is there anything else you learned that might assist you in being an effective advocate?

Assignment #2

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

Assignment #3

This year, HECSE will continue its focus on the urgent matter of educator shortages (teachers, faculty, related service personnel, etc.). In preparation, please research and review your state's current educator shortage data including but not limited to specific shortage areas, number of vacancies per shortage area, and the geographic/demographic nature of districts/schools with significant shortages. Second, please research and review your state and college/department's policies, practices, and current initiatives (e.g. state policies and/or funding, college program restructuring, current college grants, curriculum changes in preservice preparation programs) related to addressing educator shortages. Be prepared to discuss your findings at the opening dinner.

Assignment #4

Spend some time on the HECSE website. What did you learn? What would you like to know about HECSE? Find one interesting fact about HECSE to share with the group.

Assignment #5

At the end of the course, each participant will determine an act of advocacy in the public policy arena that they will accomplish. This may be a group project, so be looking for possible opportunities to network/collaborate with fellow short course members throughout the week.



Key Resources and Optional Research

Please use the following resources and research options to further enhance your policy knowledge. Resources are organized into areas of interest.

Topic 1: Background on the Educator Shortages

- The Context of the Demand for Special Education Faculty: A Study of Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs
 - <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0888406412444760>
- Boe, E. E., deBettencourt, L. U., Dewey, J., Rosenberg, M., Sindelar, P., & Leko, C. (2013). Variability in demand for special education teachers: Indicators, explanations, and impacts. *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal*, 21(2), 103-125. doi: [10.1080/09362835.2013.771563](https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2013.771563)
- Learning Policy Institute
 - <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/>
- West, J. E. (2018). *Flexing your advocacy muscles to address teacher shortages*. Retrieved from <https://www.pageturnpro.com/Midwest-Symposium-for-Leadership-in-Behavior-Disorders/86925-RETHINKING-Behavior-Fall-2018/flex.html#page/45>
- 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
 - <http://journals.sagepub.com/mutex.gmu.edu/home/tes> (scroll down on the journal's homepage to see the list of podcasts including this one)

Topic 2: Essential Guides to Legislation

- Politico Guide to Legislation and the Executive Branch
 - *Attached in email*
- Khan Academy. (nd). *How a bill becomes a law*. Retrieved from <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-government-and-civics/us-gov-interactions-among-branches/us-gov-structures-powers-and-functions-of-congress/v/how-a-bill-becomes-a-law>
- Congress.gov. (nd). *Overview of the legislative process*. Retrieved from <https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process>
- Hollister, D. (May 2007). *A public policy primer*. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.
 - <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED510117.pdf>



Topic 3: HECSE's Impact on Two Legislative Vehicles

Higher Education Act

- HECSE releases a weekly blog on updates in Washington, DC. Dr. West's blog provides the most up-to-date information regarding the movement on legislation at the federal level.
<http://www.janewestconsulting.com/>
- The Current Higher Education Act – 2008
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html>
- College Affordability Act (H.R. 4674)
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4674?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22HR+4674%22%5D%7D&s=5&r=1>
- <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/teach-grant.pdf>
- <https://aacte.org/policy-and-advocacy/federal-policy-and-legislation>
- <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/07/02/624278514/senators-to-devos-on-teach-grant-debacle-urgent-that-these-mistakes-are-fixed>

Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Bills

- Labor HHS Appropriations bill that passed the house floor HR 2740 (Rosa DeLauro lead sponsor)
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2740?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Rosa+DeLauro+Appropriations%22%5D%7D&s=4&r=4>
- Committee Report for HR 2740
<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/116th-congress/house-report/62/1?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22Rosa+DeLauro+Appropriations%22%5D%7D&r=4&overview=closed>
- <https://cef.org/advocacy/priorities-in-the-116th-congress/>
- <http://www.janewestconsulting.com/>

Topic 4: Websites, Blogs, & Twitter

- Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
<http://www.hecse.net/>
- Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Education Task Force
http://www.c-c-d.org/rubriques.php?rub=taskforce.php&id_task=2
- Politico (You can sign up for emails!)
<http://www.politico.com/education/>
- Rick Hess: American Enterprise Institute
<http://www.frederickhess.org/>
- U.S. Department of Education
- <http://www.ed.gov/> (You can sign up for emails!)
- American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities <https://aidd.org/news-policy/policy>



Suggested Twitter Follows

- @janewestdc
- @SarahNagro
- @HECSEducation
- @TED_CEC
- @AACTE
- @LPI_Learning
- @HELPCmteDems
- @GOPHELP
- @EdLaborCmte
- @EdLaborGOP
- @EdFunding