

Tips for a Successful Congressional Meeting.

Scheduling the Meeting

- Coordinate with colleagues from your state to schedule joint appointments with your U.S. Senators.
- Use the [Find Your Representative by ZIP Code](#) tool to identify your House member and schedule an appointment. If other attendees share the same representative it would be helpful to coordinate. Meeting with your representative's office is important, as they work for you.
- Schedule meetings in advance.
- Check the website of the Member of Congress you seek to meet with to get additional information on requesting a meeting.
- Using your university or personal letterhead, use the HECSE draft letter to schedule your meeting. Email the letter.
- Ask to meet with the legislative assistant who covers education or with your Representative if you know them or have reason to believe they will meet with you.
- Follow up with a phone call if you do not hear back from the email request.
- Confirm the location of the meeting. Some may prefer a virtual meeting.
- After the meeting is confirmed, you may want to email them the HECSE legislative priorities and one-pager on the special educator shortage in advance.
- Send a brief *thank you* to the staff or member for finding the time to meet with you.

Preparing for the Meeting

- Using their website, research your Representative's position on issues, a record of legislative support and priorities, committee assignments, and time in Congress.
- Develop an information sheet about special education programming. This one-pager should include information that demonstrates your department's productivity and contributions to the field, highlighting your doctoral preparation program and any doctoral or other grants you or your colleagues have received.
- Bring materials to the meeting that will showcase the work of your program and HECSE priorities. Have a local story to tell that makes your point.
- Make sure that, before the meeting, you possess a comprehensive understanding of the shortage of special education teachers and higher education faculty and programs in your area and state. Specific numbers are helpful.
- Be prepared to make a statement about the impact of the COVID pandemic on the special education workforce in your area, the pipeline of special educators in your programs, layoffs/furloughs of faculty that affect your programs, and what will be needed to ensure the continuation of equitable learning opportunities for all students served under IDEA.
- Review the HECSE legislative priorities so that you are prepared to discuss these as well.

- Plan what you will say. If going with a group, determine who will discuss what issues ahead of time.
- Know and be prepared to respond to positions and arguments that might be contrary to HECSE and the field at large.
- Choose no more than three key issues to focus on.

Conducting a Successful Visit

- Brief **introduction of HECSE** and purpose of the meeting
- **Round robin introductions** (if there is more than one person) naming institution and role at institution; you may want to note that you are a constituent and/or that your institution is in the Member's district.
- **Problem statement:** Why we are here: Examples might include shortage of special educators, shrinking programs and pipeline, impact on K-12 students – how the pandemic has exacerbated all of this; how shortage is an impediment to fully opening schools and addressing learning loss; impact of lowered standards for teachers (and substitutes) on students and more. (The HECSE one pager on the special educator shortage could be helpful here.)
- **Share a story** e.g. we have plenty of candidates who want to be special educators, but because of state budget cuts and furloughs, we don't have enough faculty to teach them (a story that exemplifies a problem previously noted).
- **The solution:** mention any federal funds that your program has received and the impact, e.g. our doctoral preparation grant for new special education faculty enabled us to provide new faculty members who will enable programs to prepare new sped teachers which we desperately need; TEACH grants have really enabled us to recruit diverse candidates
- **The ASK:** We would like to urge you to: (pick no more than three of the HECSE legislative priorities to focus on (Be sure they have a copy of the HECSE legislative priorities.)
- **Listen:** You might begin by asking: Are our requests items you all could consider? Is there more information we could provide for you? What are the priorities for your office this year in education? Is there a way we might work with you moving forward?
- **Ask if you can take a photo and post on social media?** This is optional. Some offices like to broadcast their meetings and other do not. Do not take photos or tweet about meeting without permission.
- **Ending and Follow up:** let them know you want to be a resource for them on special education and teacher preparation. Let them know you will follow up. Thank them for the meeting.
- **Caution:** Do not discuss partisan politics.

After the visit

- Send a thank you email and provide any follow up information they may have requested. Re-iterate the “ASKS.”
- Send a thank you to the staff or member for finding the time to meet with you accompanied by a brief recap of the discussion (2-3 sentences) and your contact information.
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- Maintain communication with the office by sending them news – receipt of federal grants, accomplishment of your programs, new challenges related to what you discussed etc.
- You may want to invite them to speak to one of your classes virtually.