

Welcome to the NAGC National Legislative Action Network (LAN)

What You Can Do Now

- Familiarize yourself with the House & Senate websites
- Check the 2 key committees (see below) to see if your Members are on one of them
- Get familiar with the NAGC legislative update page; we'll do our best to keep it as up to date as possible so that you can get the latest developments between LAN newsletters
- Read the NAGC legislative proposals to amend No Child Left Behind. We primarily will be working on these three initiatives in the 111th Congress.

As the new Congress and new Administration get underway, we are very pleased to work with you on the range of issues that we want to bring before federal policy makers, and to work with you to raise awareness of the needs of gifted and talented children, generally. Having a network will not only increase the number of voices heard on Capitol Hill, but will also allow us to target messages in the House of Representatives. This electronic newsletter will be sent to the network every month, more often if Congressional activity requires time-sensitive action. The LAN is an important component of the broader legislative advocacy effort that Jane Clarenbach and Carolyn Kaye coordinate with NAGC's state affiliate organizations and NAGC's general membership.

Each issue of the newsletter will include an update of the NAGC legislative agenda and action to take on the various initiatives. We will also include suggestions for other advocacy work that you can begin doing to help build a foundation of support for the initiatives and for gifted and talented education.

We will set aside space in future newsletters for links to the basic contact and background information, sure to be important for anyone joining the LAN as we move along through the year.

Getting Started in 2009

There currently is no pending legislation that requires immediate action. This is the perfect time to begin the process of introducing, or re-introducing ourselves to our Members of Congress and their staff, letting them know about the gifted students in their districts and states, and raising awareness of how federal legislation and funding can make a difference for them and for the nation. There are approximately 70 new Members of Congress who will need special attention.

House and Senate Websites

For general Congressional contact information, visit the House and Senate websites (www.house.gov www.senate.gov) We have published a congressional directory (pdf format) that is linked from the NAGC legislative update page at <http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=585&a1> . Note that there will be additional office address changes in the Senate in the next several weeks while the new Senators get settled. The phone numbers, however, should not change. The House and Senate websites also have links to all kinds of interesting items including the *Congressional Record*, where the proceedings

of the House and Senate are published and to the Library of Congress where copies of bills and the latest information on a bill's status are posted. The 111th Congress is still getting organized, so expect a few changes in the next month.

Key Committees

We've posted the rosters for the House and Senate committees on education and appropriations in the legislative update area of the NAGC website at (<http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=585&al>). These are the key committees that handle the issues of greatest concern to gifted education advocates, which means that they are often the most influential on the legislation we will be working on. That's not to say that others Members of Congress do not have influence, but the committee structure and the committee hearing process ensure that committee members are the most deeply immersed, and therefore expert, on the issues over which the committee has oversight.

NAGC's Website - Legislative Update Page and Legislative Proposals

The legislative update webpage also has links to the NAGC legislative proposals we'll be taking to Capitol Hill. In some cases, such as the Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, we'll continue our previous work to ensure there is funding for the program. We'll also continue our work to strengthen the accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. In other cases, we will be working on something new – such as our Equity and Excellence proposal, which is aimed at closing the achievement gap for bright disadvantaged students. We've also posted a recap of our work in the 110th Congress, including our Higher Education Act victories at <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=4012>.

Next Steps for NAGC on Legislation

Over the next several weeks NAGC staff will be getting reacquainted with our long-time supporters as well as staff members of the education committees to determine when they will be back at work on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind and with staff on the appropriations committees to learn more about the calendar for action for Fiscal Year 2010 decisions. We also are working to get the Equity and Excellence proposal introduced in both the House and Senate before the end of February. We will have more information to share with you next month.

Next Steps for LAN on Legislation

We ask that you spend time this month gathering key information that you'll need through the year as well as spend some time brushing up on the upcoming legislative initiatives and supporting research.

You should know the names and contact information for the staff in your Representative and Senators' offices that handle education and education funding issues (note that education funding issues are sometimes handled by an appropriations staff person, not the education staff person). Getting to know these key staff members is extremely helpful to ensuring that information about gifted students is heard by your Members of Congress. Likewise, you should also find out the location, phone numbers, and key staff for the local offices for your Members of Congress. Not all of you will be coming to Washington for meetings here, but you can schedule a meeting during Congressional recesses in the district and state, or attend a community meeting to speak out on behalf of gifted learners.

Legislative advocacy is often like a marathon, where patience and persistence is rewarded. The process of persuading policymakers can often take many years and many contacts, although we also have surprising breakthroughs,

which provide a dose of adrenaline for all of us. The first step in the process is to educate and raise awareness, which often means talking with staff, attending community functions, writing letters to the editor of your local papers, cultivating partnerships with others, and meeting with Members of Congress in DC and at home.

We hope that you're as enthusiastic as we are about the new challenges and opportunities; we ask that you encourage others to join the network at <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=3642>

Other Advocacy Efforts

We hope that many of you will be interested in working in multiple ways to support the federal legislative agenda, although we understand that you won't be able to do everything!

As part of our overall legislative advocacy efforts, NAGC is working with an outside firm on our legislative program, as well as on media messages that support the legislative initiatives. This general advocacy effort is important to raise awareness so that elected officials read about their constituents' concerns in the local media. So far, NAGC has had success in getting editorials and letters to the editor placed in key newspapers on the major themes that support our legislative agenda (see the op-ed pieces at <http://www.nagc.org/index2.aspx?id=3134>).

Letters to the Editor

NAGC will be developing a steady supply of sample letters to the editor that can be adapted for use locally, depending on issues that your communities and states are dealing with. We encourage you to author the letters, or look around for other supporters who would be willing to co-sign them or author them on their own. For example, the leader of your local chamber of commerce might co-author a letter about the connection between support for gifted education and ensuring that there is a pipeline of talent needed by the local business community.

This month, which is so often a very busy time for advocates because most of your state legislatures come into session, we share two sample letters to the editor that can be sent to your local newspaper.

The letters focus on the key issues we typically face as advocates, and include a call for policymakers to take action – which would include policymakers at all levels. One letter identifies four things that all elected officials need to know about gifted education. The letters are really templates: you should tailor them to your state and community. Indeed, linking them to local issues of concern not only strengthens them, but also increases the chance of publication in your local newspapers.

We encourage you to get comfortable with this type of advocacy -- it's an easy way to educate your newspaper's readers to the needs of gifted students. Click on <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=3148> for the Letters to the Editor page on the NAGC website. We'll be adding sample letters to the website throughout the year.

If you have ideas for other letters to the editor topics, or suggestions on what other information NAGC should post on its website for advocates, please let us know by sending an email to giftedsupported@nagc.org.

Again, we are very excited to kick-off the Legislative Action Network and about your participation. We look forward to working with you.

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