

1. If possible, call your Representative's and/or Senator(s)' offices in advance. Mention that you are a constituent and give your specific town/city, ask to schedule an appointment with the Legislative Assistant for Education for the particular date you want, and say you'd like to talk about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/NCLB. You can get your representative's and senators' office phone number and office address by dialing the U.S. Capitol switchboard: (202) 224-3121. Just give the operator the name of your representative or senator, and you'll be connected to the office.

NOTE: If you do not know who your representative and/or senators are, just give the U.S. Capitol operator the city/town where you live or your ZIP code, and the operator will get the information for you. This information is also available on line at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.

2. Find directions for how to get to the Congressman or Senator's office from the office's receptionist or the Internet. (See http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/visit/us_capitol_map/index.html for a map and other good information about the Capitol "campus").

3. If possible, look up your representative's general policy positions and priorities on the federal role in K-12 education at his/her website. Look especially at the pages on "Issues"/ "Education" and "Biography." This should help you decide which changes in the law you may most want to emphasize, i.e., those which this representative may be most likely to support.

4. Before your meeting, review the steps in this memo and the accompanying substantive memo, "Key Changes Required in ESEA/NCLB." Then, carefully plan, (and, if helpful, write out for yourself) what points you want to make at the meeting.

Be aware that you may only be given 10 or 15 minutes for your meeting. Therefore, it is extremely important to know in advance what your top priority points are, so you can be sure to get to them. Alternatively, meetings may go for as long as an hour or more, or anywhere in-between. However, you're not likely to know that in advance, so **always focus just on the vital points. Don't let yourself get sidetracked.**

5. Allow yourself a half hour more than you think you'll need to locate the office prior to the meeting, , because sometimes offices can be hard to find. Be sure to arrive on time for the actual meeting; a few minutes early would be fine, too!

6. When you get to the office, go in and introduce yourself to whichever receptionist greets you, giving your name and where you live. Congressional staff is particularly interested in meeting with constituents. After all, you may be a "vote" in the next election!

If you have been able to schedule an appointment in advance, say that you're there for an appointment with _____ (name of the staffer) and the time of your appointment . If you do not have an appointment, ask if the Legislative Assistant for Education might be available to talk about the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/NCLB. If the staffer cannot meet then, ask if you could schedule a time to come back later that day or the following day, if that's practicable for you and it's a regular business day.

At this point, the receptionist will often ask you if you have a business card; if so, provide one. (The receptionist will then typically either call, e-mail or walk to the legislative staffer to let the staffer know that you are there and want to meet. The receptionist will then let you know what the status is - hopefully, that the staffer will be able to meet with you shortly.)

7. When you meet the staffer, introduce yourself to her/him with your name and where you live, and thank the staffer for being able to meet with you. Be friendly! If you can establish that you have something in common with the staffer, e.g., same hometown, college, sports teams, friends, etc., that's great. The staffer will take you to someplace to talk. This can be anywhere from the personal office of the representative or senator to a conference room, the staffer's office, a table in the reception area, standing in the hallway outside the office, or a coffee shop elsewhere in the building. Do not be concerned about the site of your meeting, because meeting space for congressional staff is often very limited. It's not where you sit, but what you have to say, that counts.

8. Once you're settled and the staffer indicates s/he is ready for you to begin, start talking about the points you wish to cover. You should feel free to take out any notes or outline that you have prepared in advance, lay it on the table, and use that throughout the meeting to guide what you say and as a checklist to be sure you make all your points.

9. A good way to start may be, for example: "I'd like to talk with you about some of my negative experiences with NCLB and what changes need to be made in it through the ESEA reauthorization. I'd also like to address why it is so important to make those changes this year. "

Throughout the meeting, of greatest importance is to talk about things you believe in and care about, and that you use whatever language and terms are comfortable and natural for you. Remember: you're just having a conversation! The suggested language in these memos is simply to assist you with how certain concepts might be expressed.

10. After you give a general description of what you want - your "ASK" - explain why you care about these NCLB issues, how NCLB has affected you, your school, your children, people you know, your district and state, etc. That is, tell your "**personal story.**" This is likely to be most effective if you focus on specific example(s) you've experienced or seen that show that NCLB's "tests and sanctions" accountability scheme does not work and, in fact, causes harms, in your own school, district or state.

11. After your personal story, say how you think NCLB needs to be fundamentally changed - along the lines of: "the law's emphasis needs to be changed from 'tests and sanctions' to 'helping schools improve.'"

12. If you're conversant with the law and want to offer specifics, that's great. You can use some, or all, of the policy changes included in the accompanying memo, "**Key Changes Required in ESEA/NCLB**" as a guide. HOWEVER, you do NOT have to be an "expert" on NCLB to do this! (See #13, below).

13. The staffer may ask questions at any time. Answer directly, to the best of your knowledge and information. However, it's o.k. if you do not know the answer. Just say: "I'm sorry, I do not know the answer to that question." If possible, you may offer to get the answer and send it to the staffer later. If the question takes you off your subject, respond briefly, and return to your priorities. If you find the question provocative, keep your cool - just respond calmly and rationally. Remember, your goal is to try to persuade the staffer to your view of what should happen with ESEA.

14. At each stage of the conversation, it can be helpful to mention personal examples to illustrate your points or respond to questions. Putting a “human face” on your presentation can be very compelling!

15. After you have finished explaining the key changes in the law that you are advocating, it can be very helpful to offer to provide some resources. For example: “These are the major points that I wanted to make. In addition, I have some information for you that provides more detail on some of these issues.”

There are five papers listed below I recommend that might be useful to a staffer. (Look at these prior to the meeting and decide which, if any, of them you would like to offer copies of to the staffer.)

a. G. Ratner, “What’s Wrong with NCLB? False Premises and Harmful Effects,” *Huffington Post* (March 7, 2011), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gary-m-ratner/no-child-left-behind_b_830635.html

b. Citizens for Effective Schools, “Why The No Child Left Behind Act Needs To Be Restructured to Accomplish Its Goals And How To Do It,” Full page ad, *Roll Call* (March 8, 2007) <http://www.citizenseffectiveschools.org/rollcall2.pdf>

c. G. Ratner, “How to Overhaul NCLB to Help Schools Improve: Implement Common Elements of Success,” *Huffington Post* (March 23, 2011), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gary-m-ratner/how-to-overhaul-nclb-to-h_b_839130.html

d. G. Ratner, with M. Neill, “Common Elements of Successful School Turnarounds: Research and Experience,” (May 13, 2010), <http://www.citizenseffectiveschools.org/successfulschoolturnarounds.pdf>

e. Forum on Educational Accountability, “A Research - and Experience-Based Turnaround Process,” (June 17, 2010), <http://www.edaccountability.org/pdf/FEA-TurnaroundStatementJune2010.pdf> .

16. You might also mention these two websites as containing further relevant information: Citizens for Effective Schools, www.citizenseffectiveschools.org, and the Forum on Educational Accountability, www.edaccountability.org .

17. At the end of the meeting, consider making two final points:

a. “Because NCLB is so ineffective and harmful for your constituents, it is extremely important to make these improvements now. My friends and colleagues and I would like to ask Representative ___/Senator ___ to hold an open forum back home this fall on the problems with NCLB and how it should be restructured. Could you please convey that request to the Representative/Senator?” [NOTE: Follow up with a written request when you return home.]

b. “Would it be o.k. if I stayed in touch with you on these issues over the coming months as the ESEA reauthorization moves forward?” [NOTE: Get the staffer’s card. E-mail is the most effective way to communicate.]

18. “Thank you very much for meeting with me.” Shake hands and leave.

19. When you get home, send an e-mail thank-you to the staffer and reiterate your interest in being a resource on issues related to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization.

*Prepared for SOS Conference, Workshop: *How You Can Help Get Congress to Transform “No Child Left Behind” Now*, American University, Washington, D.C. (July 28, 2011), by Gary M. Ratner, Esq., Founder and Executive Director, Citizens for Effective Schools, www.citizenseffectiveschools.org .