At the end of June the Senate Appropriations Committee met and voted on the funding levels for the Labor, Health & Human Services, Education Appropriations bill (or, Labor, HHS, Ed) for fiscal year 2006. Similar to the House of Representatives’ bill, the Senate version cuts education funding for the first time in a decade.

With little discussion about Senators’ “concerns” regarding poor funding levels for vital education programs like Title I and IDEA, the entire Senate Appropriations Committee voted in favor of the bill and offered no amendments to increase education funding. Now, the full Senate must consider and vote on the bill—most likely in September when Congress returns from its August recess.

Facts about the Senate Labor, HHS, Ed bill:

Vital education programs like Title I and IDEA receive paltry increases of $100 million each. IDEA’s “increase” actually reduces the federal share of special education spending from 18.6 percent to 18 percent (Remember, Congress pledged to provide 40 percent of the excess costs of educating special needs students when it mandated IDEA to the states 30 years ago).

The total funding increase for Title I will provide approximately $4.55 per student. Will this cover your cost increases for the next year?

The total funding increases for IDEA will provide approximately $11.62 per child. Does this adequately compensate the increased costs of educating your special needs students over the next year?

Thirteen education programs are eliminated (10 fewer than in the House bill)
Many other programs received little or no increase, failing to account for increased enrollment or inflation. These include: School Leadership, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Javits Gifted & Talented, Rural Education, and others.

If these numbers look familiar, you’re not imagining things. The Senate used funding amounts similar to those provided by the House of Representatives—but some programs (such as IDEA) received even less in the Senate bill!

During the 2005 National Leaders’ Conference (NLC) in July, nearly 500 elementary, middle and high school principals marched on Capitol Hill, expressing their desire to see improvements made to the No Child Left Behind Act (NLCB) and to express their concerns regarding the downturn in the federal investment in education. Joining forces with their colleagues from the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), elementary school principals made an important impact on Congress and were generally pleased with the feedback from their legislators.
Starting the conference with a comprehensive legislative briefing from NAESP and NASSP government relations staff and a panel of three Capitol Hill staffers, NLC attendees were well prepared to meet their legislators the following day. Many principals reported willingness among their legislators to change and improve upon NCLB—some even expressing support for changes before the 2007 reauthorization deadline. This reflects the same change in messaging NAESP’s Federal Relations Coordinators reported during the Federal Relations Conference this past spring. This is a great example of the impact your advocacy can have on Congress. Your hard work has helped some in Congress see the light regarding the changes needed to improve NCLB.