



Contact: Dr. Jason Leahy, Executive Director  
217-525-1383  
jason@ilprincipals.org  
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### **IPA Advocates for Students on the Hill**

Illinois school leaders recently participated in the annual National School Leaders Advocacy Conference in Washington D.C., hosted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. This annual event includes school leaders from across the country coming together to advocate for policies that benefit students and education. This year's conference had a special focus on two critical issues: the educator shortage and student mental health needs.

Among the attendees from Illinois were IPA President Raul Gaston, NAESP Zone V Director Dr. Bridget Belcastro, IPA Diversity and Equity Chair Denise Gamble, IPA Treasurer Craig Beals, IPA Legislative Chair Darin Loepker, IPA Government/Public Relations Director Alison Maley, and IPA Executive Director Dr. Jason Leahy, all of whom played an active role in the conference's activities. They participated in various sessions and workshops that addressed the most pressing issues facing education today.

One of the highlights of the conference was the visit to the offices of several prominent politicians, including Senator Dick Durbin, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Representative Mike Bost, Representative Nikki Budzinski, Representative Jonathan Jackson, Representative Sean Casten, and Representative Brad Schneider. The purpose of these visits was to discuss [specific policies and legislation](#) that could address the educator shortage and support students' mental health needs. The Illinois delegation also emphasized [concerns with school leader pipeline in Illinois and offered solutions to this critical issue](#).

During the visits, the school leaders had the opportunity to present their perspectives and concerns about education, and to advocate for policies that could help address these issues. They emphasized the importance of investing in teacher training and development programs to attract and retain high-quality educators. They also discussed the need for policies and funding to support students' mental health needs, including increasing access to mental health services and resources.

Overall, the NAESP/NASSP School Leaders' Advocacy Conference was a valuable opportunity for school leaders to come together, share their experiences and perspectives, and advocate for policies that benefit schools and students. The visits to the offices of prominent politicians were particularly important, as they provided a platform for school leaders to directly engage with policymakers and have their voices heard on the national stage.

#### **About Illinois Principals Association**

The Illinois Principals Association is a professional association serving more than 6,000 school leaders throughout Illinois. IPA seeks to ensure that every Illinois school community has an effective and sustained school leader by working to develop, support, and advocate for innovative educational leaders across the State. Learn more about the IPA at [ilprincipals.org](http://ilprincipals.org).