

## Go Out, Get Involved, and Make a Difference

Are you actively involved in the decision making that affects your work in the field of education? Do you have a strong opinion on what changes should be made? Do you wish our government would make a legislative change that would directly affect you and your students? You can do something about this and let your voice be heard!



**J. Suppa-Friedman, NCTE Liaison, Congressman Tom Perriello, Representative 5th District, and Adria Merritt, VATE President-elect, meet in the Rayburn Building on Capitol Hill, April 22, 2010**

This past April 22, 2010, educators from 25 states descended upon Washington, D.C., for Literacy Education Advocacy Day sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English. Several teachers from Virginia gathered at our nation's Capitol knowing that teacher expertise is sought after by our congressmen. What happens in literacy classrooms affects policy. NCTE met in January with government education officials to find out how they were thinking about the Elementary Secondary Education Act on the threshold of its review knowing the need for its reform. Based on the current information, NCTE developed a goal which included what we should ask our congressmen to support either as a co-sponsor and/or voting for a particular bill.

Those educators attending heard from Massie Rich, who oversees outreach for Arnie Duncan and the Department of Education. We educators also heard from Senator Patty Murray, who is one of the leading voices of the LEARN Act in the Senate. The important elements of the LEARN Act include the following: Demonstrates the interdependent and reciprocal relationship of reading and writing; requires instruction that is developmentally and contextually appropriate, and meaningfully engages students; recognizes the importance of literacy in all content areas; and connects literacy learning across all grade levels.

Senator Murray presented shocking statistics. One of these was that eight million plus students are reading below grade level. Another was that only 15% of low income eighth graders read at grade level. The others are less likely to graduate from high school. She stressed that we need high quality literacy instruction at all ages of development from birth. She felt that schools had the tools and resources and that there was 2.5 billion in grants to help with funding.

Our focus for meeting with our congressmen was asking for the support of the LEARN Act and teacher effectiveness. We asked our congressmen, Senator Warner and Senator Webb,

and Representative Perrillo, to support teachers as professionals in defining their effectiveness. The definition needed to include professional practices, impact on student learning fairly and fully determined through balanced assessment, and professional development as an essential element.

Senator Murray asked us educators to "go out and get involved and make a difference." If she believes that educators have this voice, this power, then we should too. VATE believes that we have educators in our state who want to voice our concerns and need to show our congressmen. We are seeking to have a large contingency from the Old Dominion to show that we do care. Therefore, we ask you to become involved and join us on Capitol Hill this coming April, 2011, when we meet with NCTE, and along with teachers from across the USA, let our voices be heard and ring out in the heralded stone buildings surrounding our Capitol.



**J. Suppa-Friedman, NCTE Liaison, in Russell Senate Office Building before meeting with Senator Warner's education aide, April 22, 2010**



**Adria Merritt, VATE's President, planning her meeting with Senator Webb's aide, April 22, 2010**



**Sarah Tanner-Anderson, VATE's President-elect, in front of the renovated Capitol, Advocacy Day, 2009**



**J. Suppa-Friedman, Senator Mark Warner, and Sarah Tanner-Anderson meet Senator Mark Warner for breakfast, May, 2009.**

Janice Suppa-Friedman, NCTE Liaison