

March 18, 2010

The Honorable David R. Obey
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
2358-B Rayburn House Office
Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Todd Tiahrt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education
and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Tiahrt:

We, the undersigned education organizations, are writing to urge you to provide \$500 million to support the continued development, implementation, and funding of a comprehensive literacy initiative for the nation that encompasses early childhood, elementary, and secondary education. We also continue to support the requirement for States to allocate at least 15 percent of its literacy grants to serve children from birth through age 5, 40 percent of its grants to serve students in kindergarten through grade 5, and 40 percent of its grants to serve students in middle and high school.

To be successful in the 21st century requires skills that an earlier generation never imagined. What students need to know and be able to do to be ready for higher education, work, and civic life is constantly evolving. It is clear, however, that all citizens need advanced literacy skills in order to think critically as well as to access new information and technologies. Creating globally competent graduates depends on students using their reading and writing skills to develop important abilities in such areas as math, science and technology.

Literacy development, however, is an ongoing process, beginning in early childhood and continuing through elementary and secondary school. Even before the beginning of formal schooling, children from low-income families are less likely than students from higher-income families to recognize letters and understand the relationship between letters and sounds. Without intervention, disparities in educational outcomes persist throughout elementary school and beyond. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, more than two thirds of all fourth and eighth graders are not proficient readers, and these students are disproportionately poor and minority. Further, researchers at ACT have found that, absent strong intervention, eighth-grade academic achievement is highly predictive of college and career readiness at graduation.

We look forward to working with you to promote a comprehensive literacy program so that states, working in partnership with effective national initiatives, can provide the resources to school districts so that students graduate with the skills they need to know to be ready for higher education, work, and civic life.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
Association of American Publishers
International Reading Association
Knowledge Alliance
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council of Teachers of English
National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform
National Middle School Association
National School Boards Association
National Title I Association
Parent-Child Home Program
Reading Recovery Council of North America
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.