

March 23, 2007

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
335 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
173 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Sessions and Senator Murray:

On behalf of the 8 million students in grades 4 through 12 who are reading below grade level, we are writing to thank you for introducing S. 958, the Striving Readers Act. This important bill will help states, districts, and schools ensure our nation's adolescents, including children with disabilities and English language learners, read and write well enough to learn in school, graduate on time, and succeed in college and the workplace.

Last year, Congress appropriated over \$1 billion for the Reading First program available for every state to ensure children read by the third grade. That was an important investment to make; however, research shows that many readers who test well in fourth grade do not carry that knowledge into upper grades.

Last year's appropriation of \$29.7 million for Striving Readers was an important first step, but at that level, the program can only support eight school districts. The U.S. Department of Education received 150 applications for those grants, showing that there is a clear need for additional investment. And this program has never been authorized, existing from year to year solely through the appropriations process. You have taken the important step of authorizing this program and funding it at a level to reach every state and help many more districts and schools.

Nationwide, 29 percent of eighth graders read "below basic" on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. These students, who are in the bottom quarter of achievement, are 20 times more likely to drop out than students at the top. In addition to impacting dropout rates, low literacy achievement prevents students from succeeding in high school and college courses in all subjects. Disturbingly, literacy rates are even lower for low-income, minority, special education, and English language learner students. Thus the National Center for Education Statistics found that 53 percent of undergraduates require remediation. One-half of these students required a remedial writing course, and 35 percent took remedial reading. The National Association of Manufacturers reported that businesses spend more than \$60 billion each year on remedial reading, writing, and mathematics for new employees.

If we are to remain globally competitive Congress must follow your lead by authorizing and funding a significant adolescent literacy investment in every state. America's declining competitiveness in the global economy is due in part to sub-par literacy skills. International comparisons of reading performance placed American 11th graders close to the bottom, behind students from the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil, and other developing nations. Our high school graduates continue to lag, as employers move jobs overseas, not for the low-cost labor alone, but also to tap into the highly literate, motivated, and technologically skilled workers that other nations can offer them. Your bill will help our nation raise its literacy levels and compete in a global arena.

The Striving Readers bill you have introduced is based on research showing that adolescents with lagging literacy skills can master college preparatory material if provided with quality literacy instruction. A recent report by ACT demonstrates that students who improve high school literacy skills also improve achievement in math and science courses, both in high school and in college.

We know that given the right instruction and opportunity every child can learn to read and write well and use that knowledge to achieve at high levels. We are glad that you agree that this investment in the future of millions of young Americans is critical to the economic future of our country.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education
International Reading Association
National Association of Secondary School Principals
Academy for Educational Development
ACT, Inc.
Alabama Department of Education
American Library Association
American School Counselor's Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
America's Choice
Association of American Publishers
Battle Creek (MI) Community Literacy Collaborative
Connecticut Association for Reading Research
District of Columbia Public Schools
Education Development Center, Inc.
Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools
Learning Disabilities Assoc. of America
National Adolescent Literacy Coalition
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Assoc. of School Psychologists
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Education Knowledge Industry Association
National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform
National Middle Schools Association
National Urban Alliance for Effective Education
National Writing Project
State of Maryland IRA Council
Success for All Foundation
The Children's Aid Society

The College Board
University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning