June 13, 2003

INCREASE FUNDING FOR VITAL PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT SECONDARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Attn: Legislative Staff responsible for Education and Appropriations

Dear Member of Congress:

As you prepare to work on a Fiscal Year 2004 appropriations bill, I encourage you to seriously consider several important recommendations made on behalf of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) – the preeminent leadership organization representing the nation’s middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and aspiring principals.

Increase Smaller Learning Communities to $200 million and provide similar increases for secondary-focused programs

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as reauthorized under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provides the primary source of federal support for K-12 schools, but secondary schools receive far less funding under this Act than elementary schools. Despite significant increases to the Title I program, which provides the bulk of school improvement funds, secondary schools receive less than 10% of these resources. Policymakers have often chosen to target resources on the early years to promote child development and address learning problems before they become too severe. NASSP strongly supports this early intervention strategy but also believes such an approach does not inoculate children from later academic and learning difficulties.

Several existing programs included in Fiscal Year 2003 authorizations begin to respond to these concerns, yet President Bush’s Fiscal Year 2004 budget eliminates them. Following is a list of programs eliminated in the President’s budget that primarily address secondary school improvement:

- Smaller Learning Communities: -$161 million
- Dropout Prevention: -$11 million
- Comprehensive School Reform: -$233.5 million
- Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program: -$32 million

In addition two additional programs, the Advanced Placement program (currently funded at $23.3 million) and the GEAR UP program (currently funded at $293 million), have been reduced in the President’s budget. At a bare minimum, we ask that all of these eliminated and reduced federal resources receive funding in the Fiscal Year 2004 appropriations bill. Based on the level of need, NASSP and a number of additional education organizations recommend that the Smaller Learning
Communities program receive an appropriation of $200 million. NASSP believes other programs primarily focused on secondary school improvement should receive similar increases.

In addition, NASSP strongly supports funding a significant new federal adolescent literacy initiative—an initiative that would build upon the successful Reading First program in grades K-3. Such a proposal would help address the needs of approximately 6 million students who reach high school reading below grade level. Undeniably, adolescent literacy must be a federal priority given the number of students who are at risk of dropping out of school due to the inability to perform basic skills upon entering secondary school. NASSP supports a recommendation made by the Alliance for Excellent Education, which has determined an effective adolescent literacy initiative would require $1 billion.

Provide $20 million for the NCLB School Leadership initiative

Equally important to the success of secondary school improvement programs is ensuring we have principals who are well prepared to perform the instructional leadership role required to effectively lead. NASSP asks that the Congress fund at a Fiscal Year 2004 level of $20 million, the Leadership Initiative authorized under No Child Left Behind. Attracting qualified school leaders to all schools, especially those in areas of high poverty, continues to be a tremendous challenge. The ESEA Eisenhower Professional Development program in current law is clearly focused on the very important task of ensuring teachers are trained and well prepared – a worthy purpose. However, research clearly indicates that there are few successful schools without successful principals and few Eisenhower dollars are used for the purpose of principal training. Schools cannot be transformed, restructured, or reconstituted without strong leadership.

Include funding for Regional Educational Laboratories and Regional Technical Instruction Programs

Finally, NASSP requests a Fiscal Year 2004 level of $67.1 million for the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and $52.7 million for the Regional Technical Instruction Programs. REL’s and Regional Technical Instruction Programs provide an invaluable resource to principals as they seek to implement NCLB. While NCLB provides funding to both the state education agency and to local districts to support implementation, it is not adequate to acquire important and needed assistance provided by REL’s and the Regional Technical Instruction Programs that operate with federal funding. In fact, the Education Sciences Reform Act passed by Congress in 2002 that reauthorizes the Regional Educational Laboratories defines one of their most critical roles as assisting state and local education agencies in implementing NCLB.

Principals across the nation look forward to your decisions regarding Fiscal Year 2004 funding. I encourage you to provide the full set of resources needed to bring middle level and high school improvement to fruition. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or Stephen DeWitt (dewitts@principals.org; 703-860-7338) at NASSP should you have any questions regarding these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Gerald N. Tirozzi, Ph.D.
Executive Director