October 2, 2003

Conferees on Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Conferees:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to include $310 million for the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program in the final Fiscal Year 2004 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill. The CSR program serves as a crucial supplement to the recently enacted No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) and will help enable schools to improve student achievement. CSR, in effect, provides the extra targeted assistance Congress intended low-performing schools to receive in order to meet NCLBA academic requirements.

According to research, the most effective means of raising student achievement in low-performing, high-poverty schools is to implement scientifically-based schoolwide reform models. Today, some of the very schools and school districts portrayed so vividly for their failures in the past are seeing sustained and encouraging improvements. For example, in the heart of inner-city Louisville, Kentucky, Jacob Elementary School’s reading scores rose nearly 20 points over the last four years. The school, where 85% of students receive free or reduced-price lunches, credits its success to incorporating a comprehensive core reading and math program using federal funds received from a CSR grant. Likewise, Lake Labish Elementary, a rural school on the outskirts of Salem, Oregon, was able to exceed federal requirements in a similar four year period, raising student test scores an astounding 34 points. Again, parents, teachers, and administrators, credit these gains to the school’s ability to bring a scientifically-based reading and math program using CSR funds.

Through the funding of critical programs such as the comprehensive school reform program, Congress has been able to make a significant difference in the lives of America's most disadvantaged students using research results that inform educators as to what works in teaching and learning. By providing funds at the House-passed level, CSR grants would enable 3,300 schools -- mostly high-poverty Title I schools -- build sustainable efforts to improved student achievement. We urge you to fund the program at $310 million and give low-performing schools the resources they need to raise student achievement and better serve their students.

Sincerely,

American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Educational Research Association (AERA)
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
Educational Testing Services (ETS)
National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
National Education Association (NEA)
National Education Knowledge Industry Association (NEKIA)
New Summerfield Independent School District, Texas
Success for All Foundation
The Consortium of Social Science Associations