June 1, 2004

United States Congress

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to include $308 million for the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program in the Fiscal Year 2005 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. The continuation of the CSR program will provide low-performing schools with additional targeted assistance to help meet the achievement requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA).

The CSR program helps schools to implement comprehensive, coherent, structured approaches to school improvement. Schools that receive CSR funds must incorporate eleven specific components in their improvement plans to raise student achievement using proven methods and strategies based on scientifically-based research.

According to the Department of Education, 28,000 schools nationwide are not making adequate yearly progress based on the standards established under the No Child Left Behind Act, including 6,500 schools the law has targeted for improvement and corrective action. Now more than ever, there is a need to help struggling schools improve their performance through comprehensive school reforms. Evaluation findings from the Department of Education show that typical schools receiving CSR grants are high-need schools with significant enrollments of low-income, minority and limited English proficient children. In short, CSR-funded schools have the greatest needs and challenges in raising student performance.

However, many schools that were struggling in the past are seeing sustained and encouraging improvements today as a result of CSR assistance. In just one example, students at Parkland High School (PHS) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina were having difficulty staying in school and passing North Carolina’s End-of-Course-Tests (EOCTs). Today Parkland has impressive increases in academic achievement – the average Parkland student composite score on the North Carolina EOCTs improved by nearly 12 percentage points and attendance rates increased to nearly 94 percent - thanks to school-wide reform using CSR funds. Similar successes can be found in other schools throughout the nation currently funded with CSR dollars.

Despite these successes, the Administration’s budget proposes to terminate funding for CSR, abruptly ending additional assistance to approximately 3,000 schools that were promised CSR resources for their reforms. Rather than duplicating Title I as suggested by the Administration, CSR helps focus Title I and other federal resources on research-based improvement strategies in schools with the greatest educational deficits.
We urge you to continue the CSR program at $308 million in FY 2005 and thereby helping to accelerate academic improvements in thousands of low-performing schools.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Teachers
Council for Exceptional Children
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National Education Knowledge Industry Association
National Parent Teacher Association
School Social Work Association of America