September 30, 2003

Member
United States Congress
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Member of Congress:

As the joint House and Senate Conference Committee begins consideration of the FY 2004 Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations bill (H.R.2660), the undersigned organizations - representing millions of parents, teachers, principals, school administrators, school board members, state leaders and other education advocates - urge you to provide at least level funding ($10.9 million) for the Dropout Prevention program.

The Dropout Prevention program helps states and school districts to implement research-based, sustainable, and coordinated school dropout prevention and re-entry programs in order to raise student achievement. At a time when schools are focused on narrowing achievement gaps between differing subgroups of students, it seems that Congress would want to retain Dropout Prevention, a program specifically aimed at providing schools with the tools to help students achieve a high school degree.

Support for Dropout Prevention is even more significant when considering that the primary source of federal school funding, authorized through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), largely addresses elementary issues. Over 90% of Title I funds – the principal NCLB program – are directed to elementary schools. Such an emphasis on elementary education is necessary and appropriate, but equally important is continuing an investment of resources throughout the education continuum in order to meet the needs of middle level and high school students.

The Dropout Prevention program is the only federal program actively working to reduce the nation’s dropout rates, and, as recent headlines tell us, it is a problem that is far more severe than previous data indicated. A report released on September 17 by the Manhattan Institute, “Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States,” authored by Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow Jay P. Greene and Senior Research Associate Greg Forster, finds that only 70% of all students in the public high school class of 2001 graduated. Furthermore, it states that only 51% of all black students and 52% of Hispanic students graduate. It is a problem that has reached enormous proportions.

Our nation’s commitment to “leave no child behind” must be met with action, not only accountability. It is time to provide the resources required to help every child become a high achiever and the support needed to overcome the challenges that he or she may encounter along the way.

Sincerely,

Chicago Public Schools
International Reading Association
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
New York State Education Department
School Social Work Association of America