September 30, 2003

House and Senate Conferees
Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations
United States Congress
Washington, DC

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), representing 33,000 of the nation’s school leaders in middle level and high schools, I encourage you to provide the highest possible level of funding for programs supporting secondary schools as you negotiate a Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations bill (H.R.2660). In addition, I urge you to oppose any “across the board” cuts that would pay for the increases of one education program at the expense of another.

Specifically NASSP requests the following, at a minimum:

- $2.2 billion for the mandatory funding of IDEA, as provided by the Senate;
- $12.4 million for the School Leadership program, as provided by both the House and Senate;
- $175 million for the Smaller Learning Communities program, as provided by the House;
- $10.9 million for the Dropout Prevention program, as provided in Fiscal Year 2003;
- $310 million for the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration, as provided by the House;
- $1.325 billion for the Perkins Vocational Education program, as provided by the Senate;

It is important to realize that the federal government provides the bulk of its federal resources to elementary schools. Secondary schools receive less than 90% of funding allocated to Title I—the largest single federal source of school improvement funds. Although Title I is critical to early school improvement, no similar foundation of federal support is supplied to secondary schools.

The funding requests included in this letter are linked to the few federal programs that directly address secondary school improvement needs:

**IDEA Mandatory Funding**
The Senate included $2.2 billion for mandatory full funding of IDEA in its FY 2004 appropriations bill so that the Congressional obligation of providing 40 percent of the average per pupil expenditure (APPE) for each special education student could finally be realized. The inclusion of this funding mirrors language in the FY 2004 Congressionally-approved Budget Resolution and the House-passed H.R.1350. NASSP and a broad coalition of other organizations have consistently requested mandatory full funding of IDEA in order to meet the very real need of providing services for these students. Without meeting the obligation, schools must continue to “make up the difference” in IDEA funding. We implore you to include the Senate-passed $2.2 billion in the final appropriations bill.
School Leadership Program
Attracting qualified school leaders and training them continues to be a tremendous challenge. Current law allows professional development funding to be used to train principals, but few funds are ever expended for this important purpose due to teacher training needs. Research clearly indicates that there are few successful schools without successful principals. Schools cannot be transformed or restructured without strong leadership. NASSP strongly advocates for funding the Principal Leadership program, which begins to address these important needs by providing $12.4 million to attract and train principals for high poverty areas.

Smaller Learning Communities
The Smaller Learning Communities program helps school districts and large schools plan, develop, implement, and expand smaller, more effective learning environments, and is one of the few programs in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) specifically focused on high school improvement. Research indicates that the size of the learning environment has an effect on student learning, particularly for poor, urban students, and high-performing, high poverty high schools are often those that are smaller and more personalized. Reconfiguring large schools into smaller learning environments results in greater student performance and also appears to improve issues related to discipline, crime and violence. Philanthropies such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation understand the need for creating smaller learning environments, but such efforts cannot succeed in addressing the need nationwide without sustained federal support.

Dropout Prevention Program
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. Dropout Prevention’s emphasis on addressing the high dropout rates of minority students goes “hand in hand” with the purposes of NCLB’s narrowing of achievement gaps.

Comprehensive School Reform
Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) serves as a crucial supplement to NCLB 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 NCLB academic requirements. By providing funds at the House-passed level, CSR grants would enable 3,300 schools—mostly high-poverty Title 1 schools and many secondary schools—to 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.
Perkins Vocational Education
The Perkins Vocational Education (Perkins) program provides the largest source of federal funds for high schools and is a critical link for students between secondary school and further education and work. It is important that students be able to couple academic study with “real world” opportunities in a connected, coherent manner, in order to determine their educational and career goals post high school. In fact, the connection between academics and the workplace offered by Perkins is often what keeps students enrolled in school and what motivates them to graduate. The $1.325 billion request for Perkins is consistent with prior years’ commitments.

NASSP looks forward to completion of a final bill that will provide improved opportunities for all students, and the corresponding resources necessary to meet the demands of a growing and diverse student population.

Sincerely,

Gerald N. Tirozzi, Ph.D.
Executive Director