June 12, 2003

Re: Fiscal Year 2004 Appropriations – Smaller Learning Communities
Attn: Legislative Staff responsible for Education and Appropriations

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the organizations listed below, representing millions of the nation’s principals, teachers, parents and students, we urge you to provide at least a $200 million funding level for the Smaller Learning Communities program in the Fiscal Year 2004 Appropriations Act.

Smaller Learning Communities is one of the few federal programs in No Child Left Behind specifically aimed at improvement of high schools. The program helps schools and school districts to plan and create smaller schools, schools within schools, and other smaller learning environments. As stated on the U.S. Department of Education’s website, “Studies indicate that the size of the learning environment has an indirect effect on student learning (Klonsky, 1998). Essentially, size creates conditions for success, especially when high expectations and standards exist. Further, when the size of the learning environment is reduced, the benefits become apparent very quickly, within a year or two.” Children and youth attending smaller schools are more likely to post higher test scores, pass their courses, and graduate from high school. In addition, achievement gaps are reduced between students in different socioeconomic and ethnic groups, and students feel safer and more valued in a small school.

Attached is a brief document prepared by the Alliance for Excellent Education that summarizes the benefits of small schools. This summary reinforces several recent reports citing numerous other research studies that indicate that smaller learning environments aid greatly with school improvement efforts. Programs to support smaller school size receive substantial private support from organizations including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Annenberg Institute, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation. But these efforts cannot succeed in addressing the need nationwide without sustained federal support. The public-private partnership that exists in support of smaller learning communities is a testament to the evidence behind and confidence in these programs.

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that approximately 70 percent of American high school students attend schools with enrollments of 1,000 students or more. We hope you will seriously consider increasing support for the Smaller Learning Communities program in a Fiscal Year 2004 Appropriations bill. Combined with strong, continued support by foundations such as Gates and Carnegie, the federal Smaller Learning Communities program will help many more schools and students meet the goals of No Child Left Behind.

Sincerely,

Association of Career and Technical Education
International Reading Association
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Magnet Schools of America
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Directors of Vocational Technical Education Consortium
National Education Association
National Education Knowledge Industry Association
National Parent Teacher Association
National Association of Secondary School Principals
School Social Work Association of America