July 19, 2004

The Honorable Bill Frist
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Frist:

The undersigned organizations representing the leaders of the nation’s public schools request the immediate appointment of conferees to begin conference committee deliberations on the IDEA Reauthorization bill (H.R. 1350). The 108th Congress has spent the better part of the last two years crafting legislation to reform the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The House of Representatives passed its bill on April 30, 2003 and the Senate passed its bill on May 13, 2004. With only a few months remaining in the 108th Congress the immediate appointment of conferees is critical, in order to provide sufficient time to resolve the difference between the two bills.

The nation’s school superintendents, boards of education, and principals have long sought significant reform of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The House and Senate reauthorization bills have made substantial improvements in streamlining requirements, reforming cumbersome procedures, curtailing unproductive paperwork, and creating opportunities for early dispute resolution. Most importantly, these reforms will allow school resources to be directed to increasing services and improving educational results for students with disabilities, instead of being expended on unnecessary processes, paperwork, and litigation.

Our organizations are gravely concerned that this opportunity to enact significant IDEA reform legislation will be lost if conference committee action does not begin soon. The superintendents, boards of education, and principals of the nation’s public schools will be sorely disappointed if the 108th Congress fails to complete its work on this important legislation prior to final adjournment. Our organizations, therefore, urge the appointment of conferees before the summer recess period. We respectfully suggest appointing the entire HELP Committee as conferees, so that each member of the Committee can participate in developing the final version of the reauthorization. Thank you for your attention to our request. A similar letter has been sent to Minority Leader Daschle.

Paul D. Houston, Executive Director
American Association of School Administrators

Michael D. Casserly, Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

Vincent L. Ferrandino, Executive Director
National Association of Elementary School Principals

Gerald N. Tirozzi, Executive Director
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Anne L. Bryant, Executive Director
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