June 2, 2004

Congressman
House Office Building
Washington, D.C.  20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of nearly 32,000 secondary school principals nationwide, I am writing to request that you support Adolescent Literacy by co-sponsoring H.R. 3085, the Graduation For All Act.

Of the over 20 million adolescents in school between the ages of 15-19,

- Six million have difficulty reading at basic levels.
- The average eighth grader who is non-white or from a low income family reads at three to four grade levels lower than students who are white and more affluent.
- Approximately 25% of high school students leave school without a diploma. Many drop out because they cannot read well enough to do the coursework.
- About 56% of Hispanics, African Americans, and students with disabilities do not finish with a diploma within four years.

There exists a large gap between those students in early grades who are now receiving additional literacy help in the form of Reading First and Early Reading First, and those students who are currently or will soon be attending secondary schools. The needs of these students must be addressed.

In his Fiscal Year 2005 budget proposal, President Bush asked Congress for a $100 million allocation for a new Striving Readers program at the secondary school level. He has recognized the necessity for an Adolescent Literacy initiative and H.R.3085 answer’s the President’s call on Congress to authorize a reading program at the secondary level.

H.R. 3085 will create a grant program that will allow for school districts to establish reading and writing programs to improve overall performance among students; it will allow them to hire literacy coaches to work with classroom teachers to incorporate reading and writing instruction in all subject areas, and to identify students with reading problems and provide remediation or referral for additional services; it will provide counseling for students at risk of not graduating on time; and it will provide for professional development for middle and high school teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals that address the literacy needs of all students.

Now is the time to address the literacy needs of secondary school students. We applaud Congress for their efforts in establishing the Reading First and Early Reading First programs and ask that you continue these efforts by supporting the needs of adolescent students. Thank you for your time and consideration. If you would like more information about H.R. 3085 or Adolescent Literacy, please contact Steve DeWitt, Associate Director of Government Affairs, at (703) 860-7338 or dewitts@principals.org.

Sincerely,

Gerald N. Tirozzi
Executive Director