Thank you for including funding in your Fiscal Year 2005 Appropriations bill for a new Striving Readers program to address the literacy needs of millions of adolescent students across the country.

Nearly 6 million of the 20 million students enrolled in middle level and high school struggle with reading. Almost 25 percent of 9th graders enter high school unable to read well enough to do high school work. Reading ability affects performance in other subjects, including mathematics and science. Academic underperformance is the primary reason students fail to complete high school. The Manhattan Institute reports graduation rates in urban schools as low as 50 percent. Those who do not complete high school are more reliant on welfare and are more likely to be incarcerated, according to a recent GAO study, so failure to achieve has consequences for both young people and for society.

The intent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)- to help all students graduate prepared for successful postsecondary opportunities- will go unfilled since federal dollars rarely stretch beyond 6th grade. Only 5 percent of NCLB Title I funds are directed to low-income, low-performing high schools. Serving the youngest first makes sense. Failure to serve older students at all has tragic consequences that can and should be addressed now with your leadership and support.

We appreciate the inclusion of funding in both the House and Senate appropriations bills for the Striving Readers initiative. However, we urge you to adopt $100 million, the amount proposed by the House of Representatives and President Bush. In addition, we advocate that local education agencies be key targets and recipients of any new adolescent literacy funding. Report language in the Senate bill indicates that funds would be made available to “partnerships including institutions of higher education, eligible nonprofit or for-profit organization and school districts.” While our organizations recognize the importance of collaboration, in this case, local education agencies are best able to identify and implement the reading and writing strategies that will improve student achievement.

For these reasons, the undersigned organizations applaud your attention to this issue and encourage adoption of the House funding level during conference for the Striving Readers initiative.

Sincerely,

Academy for Educational Development
Alliance for Excellent Education
American Association of University Women
Association of School Business Officials International
Center for Special Education
Education Legislative Services
International Reading Association
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Urban Alliance for Effective Education
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Education Knowledge Information Association
National PTA
Public Education and Business Coalition
School Social Work Association of America