February 1, 2005

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC  20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, thank you for your recent efforts to improve the literacy skills of secondary school students. We commend you for requesting $100 million in your Fiscal Year (FY) 2005 budget and for proposing $200 million for your FY 2006 budget. We are optimistic that Congress will build upon the $25 million appropriated for the program in FY 2005.

Your budget recommendations are a much needed and appropriate first step to address the approximately 6 million students who reach middle level and high school unable to read and write at grade level. Our organizations appreciate the federal early reading programs initiated by your office, and believe a similar commitment is necessary to address the literacy needs of secondary school students. We are also pleased that you have identified literacy coaches as a method of ensuring that literacy instruction is incorporated throughout the school curriculum.

Support for adolescent literacy could not come at a better time. Many older students have missed the opportunity to fully benefit from Reading First and Early Reading First programs that did not exist until a few years ago. The U.S. Census Bureau reports a 14 percent increase between 1990 and 2000 in the number of people in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home. This increase in non-English speaking Americans has direct implications for schools and the labor market.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs annual report to Congress performed by Westat research corporation, reports that the number of children ages 14-17 with specific learning disabilities increased by approximately 400 million from 1994 to 2003. And the recently passed Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) now stipulates that eligibility determination for special education generally, cannot be due to a "lack of appropriate instruction in reading." Regardless of individual conclusions formed by these findings, it is apparent that additional middle level and high school reading instruction is necessary.

We look forward to working with your Administration and Secretary Margaret Spellings, and to the release of your FY 2006 budget. In addition, we appreciate the outreach from the U.S. Department of Education related to the implementation of the Striving Readers
program and look forward to helping identify the best strategies for improving literacy skills of adolescent learners.

Sincerely,

ACT
Alliance for Excellent Education
American Association of School Administrators
Association of School Business Officials International
Collaborative for Teaching and Learning
Consulting for Results
Council for Exceptional Children
Education Legislative Services, Inc.
International Reading Association
Knowledge Works Foundation
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Education Knowledge Industry Association
National PTA
National Urban Alliance for Effective Education
Project GRAD USA
Public Education & Business Coalition
Reading is Fundamental
School Social Work Association of America

c: Secretary Margaret Spellings, U.S. Department of Education