

Advocates for Literacy

October 24, 2017

Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
132 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington,
DC 20510

Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
1101 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Blunt and Cole and Ranking Members Murray and DeLauro:

On behalf of Advocates for Literacy—a coalition of more than sixty organizations focused on increasing the federal commitment to improved literacy instruction through evidence-based practices—the undersigned organizations express strong support for \$190 million in funding for the Literacy for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) program in the final Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) appropriations bill. This amount represents a freeze in funding from FY 2017 and is the funding level included in the LHHS bill passed by the Senate Appropriations Committee (S. 1771).

Literacy is the foundation for learning and essential to students' ability to progress, pursue higher education, and succeed in the workplace. Despite the fundamental importance of reading and writing, only 36 percent of fourth-grade students, 34 percent of eighth-grade students, and 37 percent of twelfth-grade students performed at or above the proficient level in the 2015 reading assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—the Nation's Report Card.¹ This means more than 60 percent of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students struggle with reading and therefore require targeted instructional support. In addition, many of the nation's young people who graduate from high school do so without the advanced literacy skills needed to succeed in college and a career. For example, around 60 percent of employers request or require high school graduates to get additional education or training to make up for gaps in their ability to read and write effectively.²

The LEARN program authorized in Title II-B of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) connects policy and practice directly by investing in the knowledge and skills of educators. On September 28, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced that eleven states, the Bureau of Indian Education and four territories are receiving new awards for their state education agencies to subgrant to local school districts and other eligible entities to provide research-based literacy instruction and interventions supporting students and early learners who are struggling to reach literacy proficiency from early childhood through high school.³

In addition, the LEARN program closely aligns with ED Secretary DeVos's proposed Priority 7—Promoting Literacy—for competitive grant programs. Specifically, the LEARN program (1) promotes literacy interventions supported by strong evidence by providing educators with the knowledge, skills,

Advocates for Literacy

professional development, and materials necessary to reinforce such interventions; (2) supports evidence-based family literacy activities; (3) facilitates the effective use of data by educators to improve literacy instruction; and (4) seeks to integrate high-quality literacy instruction across the content areas.

Educators need a stronger background in literacy instruction, so they can equip students with the reading and writing skills to learn rigorous content and graduate from high school prepared for the modern world. Therefore, the undersigned organizations of Advocates for Literacy believe the federal government must invest in the critical LEARN program. Continued federal funds are necessary for states to help local education agencies, early learning providers, and families deliver appropriate interventions for all students, birth through grade 12. A literate citizenry is active, informed, and successful.

The undersigned organizations strongly urge you to provide funding in the final FY 2018 LHHS appropriations bill for the LEARN program to support reading and writing achievement so more students graduate from high school with skills needed for success in higher education, work, and civic life. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

1. Academic Language Therapy Association
2. ACT
3. Advocacy Institute
4. Alliance for Excellent Education
5. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
6. American Occupational Therapy Association
7. Association for Career and Technical Education
8. Association of American Publishers
9. Association on Higher Education and Disability
10. Association for Middle Level Education
11. Council for Exceptional Children
12. Education Northwest
13. Early Care and Education Consortium
14. Easter Seals
15. Every Child Reading
16. First Five Year Fund
17. First Focus Campaign for Children
18. Grimes Reading Institute
19. Higher Education Consortium
20. HighScope Educational Research Foundation
21. Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)
22. Institute for Educational Leadership
23. International Dyslexia Association
24. International Literacy Association
25. Keys to Literacy
26. Knowledge Alliance
27. Learning Ally
28. Learning Disabilities Association of America
29. Literacy How, Inc

Advocates for Literacy

30. National Adolescent Literacy Coalition
31. National Association for the Education of Young Children
32. National Association of Elementary School Principals
33. National Association of School Psychologists
34. National Association of Secondary School Principals
35. National Association of State Boards of Education
36. National Association of State Directors of Special Education
37. National Black Child Development Institute
38. National Center for Families Learning
39. National Center for Learning Disabilities
40. National Coalition for Literacy
41. National Council of Teachers of English
42. National Down Syndrome Congress
43. National Down Syndrome Society
44. National Education Association
45. National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
46. National Head Start Association
47. National Title I Association
48. National Urban Alliance for Effective Education
49. National Women’s Law Center
50. National Writing Project
51. Nemours Children’s Health System
52. Parent Child Home Program
53. Parents as Teachers
54. Reading Partners
55. Reading Recovery Council of North America
56. Scholastic Inc.
57. School Social Work Association of America
58. TASH
59. TESOL International Association
60. The Arc
61. United Way Worldwide
62. WestED
63. ZERO TO THREE

Notes

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP, 2015 Reading Assessment, <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/> (accessed May 17, 2017).

² Achieve, Inc., *Rising to the Challenge: Views on High School Graduates’ Preparedness for College and Careers, Part Two: Employers and College Faculty* (Washington, DC: Achieve, April 2015), <https://www.achieve.org/files/AchieveSurveyIIPowerPoint.pdf> (accessed May 17, 2017).

³ These grants were awarded through the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) program, which the LEARN program was based upon. For more information, see <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders-literacy/index.html>.