

# Advocates for Literacy

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May 15, 2020

Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of Advocates for Literacy, a coalition of over 60 organizations that understands the imperative role of literacy – reading and writing – in creating a globally competent workforce, thank you for your past support of the Literacy for All, Results for the Nation (LEARN) program, which builds on the success of the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) program. As you work to address the tremendous impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) on K-12 schools and draft the FY 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to fund this critically important comprehensive literacy program at no less than \$500 million.

School building closures in the spring required our nation’s school leaders and educators to take on the unprecedented task of quickly implementing remote learning options for 55.1 million children with few resources and very little training. The transition was not seamless for some school districts, and educators learned quickly that home internet connections were a challenge for many of their students. The future economic impact and trauma caused by the pandemic will also negatively impact student learning. Previous research on the summer learning slide points to the potential of an even greater COVID-19 slide by September. In fact, the Collaborative for Student Growth at NWEA estimates that students will return in fall 2020 with approximately 70 percent of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year.<sup>1</sup>

The LEARN program builds on the success of the SRCL program where states implementing comprehensive literacy plans have seen significant improvements in English Language Arts achievement in districts and schools serving disadvantaged students. Eleven states (Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, New Mexico, Ohio, and Oklahoma), the Bureau of Indian Education, and four territories received SRCL grants in 2017, and an additional 13 states (Alaska, Arkansas, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Mexico, Ohio, Rhode Island, and South Dakota) received grants in 2019 under the now-named Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) program. With these grants, states are able to support high-quality professional development for teachers, principals, and specialized instructional support personnel to improve literacy instruction for struggling readers and writers, including English language learners and students with disabilities. Funds in Minnesota were used to develop a multi-faceted coaching model focused on teacher growth and support through job-embedded professional

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<sup>1</sup> Kuhfeld, M. & Tarasawa, B. (2020). *The COVID-19 slide: What summer learning loss can tell us about the potential impact of school closures on student academic achievement*. NWEA.

development. Teachers set goals for implementation and coaches help them work toward these goals through co-planning, coaching conversations, modeling, co-teaching, observation, and goal setting. Leadership teams have also increased their capacity to maintain focus on student literacy development at schools with an intentional, multi-year focus, and ensure quality professional learning that is sustained through coaching and accountability.

The literacy skills our students need today are much more complex than they were 50 years ago. Creating a globally competent workforce depends on students using their reading and writing skills to develop important abilities in areas such as math, science, technology, and manufacturing. Yet despite the fundamental importance of reading and writing, only 35 percent of fourth-grade students and 34 percent of eighth-grade students performed at or above the proficient level in the Reading assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – the Nation’s Report Card.<sup>2</sup> Of the more than 523,000 students who leave U.S. high schools each year without a diploma, many have low literacy skills.<sup>3</sup> Research clearly demonstrates that a high-quality, literacy-rich environment beginning in early childhood is one of the most important factors in determining school readiness and success, high school graduation, college access and success, and workforce readiness.

A strong federal commitment to literacy is imperative. LEARN supports states in a comprehensive, systemic approach to strengthen evidenced-based literacy and early literacy instruction for children from early learning through high school and supports district capacity to accelerate reading and writing achievement for all students. The member organizations of Advocates for Literacy urge you to allocate no less than \$500 million in the FY 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill and a significant investment for the LEARN program in any future COVID-19 support packages to support reading and writing achievement.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and we hope we can count on your support again this year.

Sincerely,

The Advocacy Institute  
American Library Association  
CAST  
Collaborative Classroom  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates  
EDGE Consulting  
Grimes Reading Institute  
International Dyslexia Association

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1992-2019 Reading Assessments.

<sup>3</sup> J. McFarland, J. Cui, J. Holmes, and X. Wang. *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2019* (NCES 2020-117) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020117> (accessed May 5, 2020).

International Literacy Association  
Knowledge Alliance  
Learning Disabilities Association of America  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators (formerly the National Title I Association)  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Center for Families Learning  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform  
National Writing Project  
Parents as Teachers  
Reading Recovery Council of North America