March 26th, 2015

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education
Committee on Appropriations
United States Congress
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education
Committee on Appropriations
United States Congress
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As your Subcommittee considers the Fiscal Year 2016 Appropriations bill for the Department of Education, we urge you to maintain the investment in the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program under the Fund for the Improvement of Education. IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries and national not-for-profit organizations, including partnerships that reach families outside of local educational agencies, for providing books and childhood literacy activities to children and families in high need communities. The program also supports parental engagement and focuses on promoting student literacy from birth through high school.

The importance of this grant program was recognized when $28.6 million was first appropriated for IAL in FY12 and $25 million each year thereafter has been directed to this essential childhood literacy initiative. In September 2012, the U.S. Department of Education awarded two-year IAL grants to 46 nonprofit organizations and school districts in 21 states and the District of Columbia. In 2014, the Department made 32 new awards to national non-profits and school libraries.

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) was a 2012 grantee and their Summer Success Model is an evidence-based solution stemming from a two-year research study under the IAL program. The study holds promise in boosting children’s reading achievement by implementing effective, scalable and affordable summer reading strategies. RIF’s model showed that more than half of children in the study saw statistically significant increases in Lexile reader measures over the summer. Of the 41 participating school districts in 16 states, the most underserved districts showed the most gains, including rural populations. In the population of 33,000 second- through fourth-grade students, the lowest performing students made the greatest gains. Over three-fourths of children that had scored below the 10th percentile either met or exceeded expected gains and nearly 60 percent of those children who had scored below the 25th percentile met or exceeded expected gains.

Todd County, KY, School District utilized its IAL grant to fund a book distribution to help build home libraries for preschool, kindergarten, and first grade students. During the two-year grant period, 10,303 books were distributed. Care was taken to select books to fit individual student needs, interests, and reading levels. The books were distributed through each school’s library media center.
Todd County also was able to use its grant to develop technologically advanced media centers with high-quality, student-friendly digital tools and resources. The centers were designed to engage students to improve reading skills and produce multimedia projects. The program also allowed librarians to work more efficiently from school or at home. Providing current, up-to-date technologies in the media centers helped reduce gaps between the technology "haves and have-nots".

Ensuring children’s access to books is a critical component of our nation’s effort to promote lifelong learning and remains a key aspect of early childhood literacy. For American families living in poverty, access to reading materials is severely limited. Children living in poverty have fewer books in their homes than their peers, and this unfortunate reality hinders their ability to prepare for school and stay on track. We also recognize the importance of effective school library programs in promoting literacy and advancing student achievement.

Congress has taken an important step in supporting the needs of disadvantaged students by providing IAL funding for book distribution, early literacy services, and effective school library programs. We ask that you maintain this investment in the FY16 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

Member of Congress
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Innovative Approaches to Literacy FY16 Appropriations Submission

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Innovative Approaches to Literacy FY16 Appropriations Submission

Michael E. Capuano  
Member of Congress

Tony Cardenas  
Member of Congress

[Signatures of other members of Congress]

[Signatures of other members of Congress]
Innovative Approaches to Literacy FY16 Appropriations Submission

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March 26, 2015

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