

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2015

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

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 most recently in FY15 when \$25 million was directed to the initiative. In September 2014, the U.S. Department of Education awarded two-year IAL grants to 31 nonprofit organizations and school districts in 15 states and the District of Columbia.

Projects funded through IAL have already produced promising results. For example, a study of Reading Is Fundamental's (RIF) 2012 grant, the Summer Success 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. Among the 33,000 second- through fourth-grade students, the lowest performing students made the greatest gains. Over three-fourths of children who scored below the 10th percentile and nearly 60 percent who scored below the 25th percentile either met or exceeded expected gains.

Kentucky's Todd County 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 through each school's library media center. Care was taken to select books to fit individual student needs, interests, and reading levels. 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. 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 life-long 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,

Jack Reed

Chuck Grassley

Rebbie Stabenow

Lyndie Weicker

Edward J. Markey

Patrick Leahy

Ben Sanders

Ken Upton

Bob Casey

J. A. B.

Mazzi K. Ariano

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Al Franken

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