

May 25, 2017

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 2018 appropriations bill for the Department of Education, we urge you to maintain the investment in the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program, authorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act. IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries and national not-for-profit organizations, including partnerships that reach families outside of schools, 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.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2012, over 100 IAL grants have been awarded to nonprofit organizations and school districts across the nation. Some examples of IAL grant activities include:

Lane Elementary School District in Oklahoma is using its IAL grant to raise the literacy proficiency of every student in grades PreK-8th. Activities include: acquiring books and extending library hours to improve each student's reading capacity; placing each student on an plan that will set benchmarks for improvement; updating library resources to include specialized and modern literacy tools, ranging from Native American-specific books to wireless reading devices; forming collaborative efforts between teachers and library staff to enhance classroom efforts; and conducting three types of book distributions so children can take books home.

Reach Out and Read (ROR) and Save the Children partnered to engage schools, families and communities in creating literacy-rich environments for children in economically disadvantaged rural areas of Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, and South Carolina. Reach Out and Read leveraged the existing health care infrastructure to promote early literacy and language development among children in 16 counties. In the second year of the grant, 163 medical providers in 42 clinics delivered developmentally appropriate anticipatory guidance at 43,000 well-child visits. Children received new books and parents learned how reading, singing, and rhyming help facilitate healthy brain development and language acquisition.

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) used IAL funds to launch a two-year research study examining best practices for stemming summer learning loss among children living in poverty. Of the 41 participating school districts across 16 states with a participating population of 33,000 second-through fourth-grade students, the most underserved districts showed the greatest literacy gains..

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 Fiscal Year 2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,