April 13, 2018

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 2019 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:

- Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, NC (WSFCS) implemented technology tools in school libraries to build literacy skills in young children and increase family engagement. The WSFCS program is increasing access to print and digital resources for youth, while developing targeted age and skill appropriate material. The grant is also supporting expanded summer media hours, distribution of material for home libraries, and training for school librarians and teachers. With over 52,000 students, WSFCS is the fifth largest school system in North Carolina.

- 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. ROR 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) launched a two-year research study focused on reducing the “summer learning slide” for children living in poverty. The study
enabled RIF to work with 41 school districts in 16 states, reaching 33,000 second, third, and fourth-grade students and their teachers. Classrooms received STEM-themed book collections, teachers received professional development and literacy resources, and students got books to take home and keep. Fifty-seven percent of the students involved in the study showed gains in reading proficiency over the summer.

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 and build on this investment in the Fiscal Year 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed

Gary Peters

Tom Carper

Jeanne Shaheen

Robert Menendez

Rebecca Stabenow

Tammy Duckworth

Maria Cantwell

Mazie Hirono
Edward J. Markey

Nina Van Vollenhoven

Ben Wyden

C. Meny

Barack Calito

August Ting
FY19 Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) funding

Read each pair from the top of the letter from left to right

Reed
Stabenow

Peters
Duckworth

Carper
Cantwell

Shaheen
Whitehouse

Menendez
Hirono

Schatz
Brown

Durbin
Baldwin

Blumenthal
Merkley

Warren
Smith

Hassan
Feinstein

Klobuchar
Heinrich

Manchin
Harris

Jones
Gillibrand

Cortez Masto
Coons

Booker
Wyden

Markey
Murphy

Van Hollen
Cardin

Sanders
King