

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2019

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 Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations, we urge you to increase funding to at least \$30 million for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program administered by the Department of Education, authorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries as well as national not-for-profit organizations, including partnerships that reach families outside of local education agencies (LEAs), to support children and families in high-need, underserved communities. By providing age-appropriate books, supporting parental engagement programs, and reinforcing professional development, the IAL program helps to support literacy skills to ensure that children enter school ready to learn and best positioned for success.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2012, 166 IAL grants have been awarded to national non-profit organizations and school districts across every region of the United States. Some examples of IAL grant activities include:

Local Education Agencies-

- The book distribution and literacy support program in the Texas Education Service Center, Region 20, builds student literacy skills for children birth through fifth grade. Region 20 received a 2018 Innovative Approaches to Literacy grant, which is being used to support teacher professional development, in-school library materials, and book distribution focusing on family engagement activities. Texas ranks low on the percentage of fourth graders reading below proficient levels. The IAL grant will help create a model that schools across the state can use to improve their literacy proficiency ratings.

National Non-Profit Organizations-

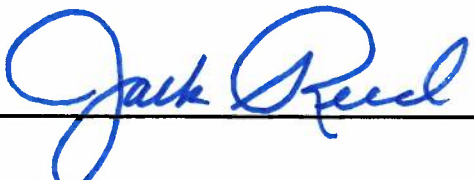
- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) used IAL funds to support 33,000 students across 31 schools districts with books and literacy resources to explore a model that drives summer reading outcomes by supporting students, teachers, and families. Fifty-seven percent of the students involved in the study showed gains in reading proficiency over the summer. RIF was also part of an IAL project with the Kentucky Education Development Corporation to support participating schools through access to books, resources, and training resulting in improved student performance in literacy

- Reach Out and Read (ROR) and Save the Children partnered to engage schools, families, and pediatric primary care providers in creating literacy-rich environments for more than 40,000 children in rural areas of Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, and South Carolina. Several school districts in Texas (Southwest, Charlotte, Cuero, and Brownsville) and Oklahoma (Idabel) have incorporated the Reach Out and Read model in recent IAL projects to integrate pediatric providers in literacy promotion activities. By partnering with health care professionals, communities are able to reach children during the earliest years of life, ensuring that parents learn how reading, singing, and rhyming help facilitate healthy brain development and language acquisition, starting at birth.

Access to high-quality literacy programming and resources remains a critical component of childhood literacy. For American families living in poverty and limited to the services of high-need local educational authorities, lack of access to quality reading materials and adequate learning facilities is prohibitive, fostering chronic disadvantages for already underserved youth. Without critical literacy support, students often fall behind in school and struggle to thrive in the workforce.

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 build on this investment in the Fiscal Year 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill by increasing funding to at least \$30 million.

Sincerely,

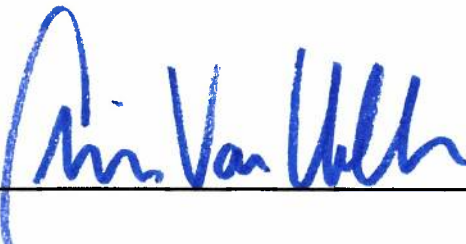












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FY20 Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) funding
Read each pair from the top of the letter from left to right

Reed
Stabenow

Blumenthal
Murphy

King
Van Hollen

Feinstein
Heinrich

Manchin
Merkley

Warren
Hassan

Whitehouse
Brown

Carper
Wyden

Klobuchar
Schatz

Peters
Smith

Booker
Hirono

Coons
Cantwell

Markey
Cortez Masto

Sanders
Menendez

Sinema
Shaheen

Jones
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Harris
Durbin

Cardin
Duckworth