

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2016

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 2017 appropriations bill for the Department of Education, we urge you to maintain the investment in the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program, which was 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 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.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2012, 78 IAL grants have been awarded to nonprofit organizations and school districts across the nation. Some examples of IAL grant activities include:

- Maryetta School District, located in a very rural, economically depressed area of Northeastern Oklahoma, is using its IAL grant to improve literacy achievement for 624 students (grades K-8th) through the intense Reading Every-day for Academic Development (iREAD) Project. Project objectives and activities support innovative programs that promote early literacy for young children, motivate older children to read, and increase student achievement by using school libraries, distributing free books to children and their families, and offering high-quality literacy activities and innovative technology tools.
- Save the Children and Reach Out and Read received a two-year grant in FY2014 to build community capacity to support children's education and well-being in some of the United States' most impoverished and isolated regions. Through this project, the two organizations are partnering to serve nearly 20,000 children in 30 rural communities in Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, and South Carolina, building home libraries, improving community collaboration, and empowering families.
- Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) used IAL funds to launch a two-year research study examining 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 most gains, including rural populations.

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.

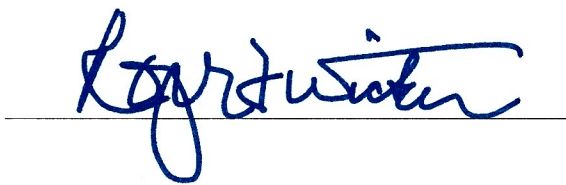
Congress has taken an important step in supporting the needs of disadvantaged students by providing IAL funding for book distribution, early literacy services, and effective school library programs. The Administration's budget request also includes funding for IAL. We ask that you maintain this investment in the Fiscal Year 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

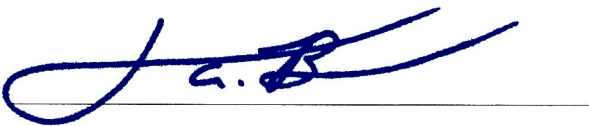
Sincerely,

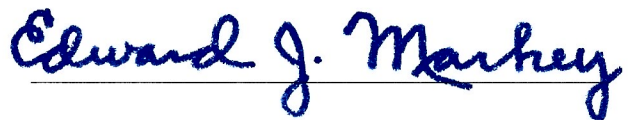






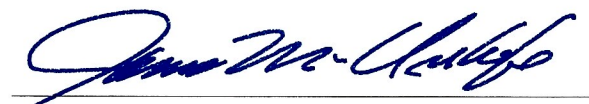














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Daryl Kott

Eric Schoof

Richard Blumenthal

Deen Decker

James Brown

FY17 Innovative Approaches to Literacy Funding

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

Reed
Grassley

Stabenow
Wicker

Booker
Markey

Wyden
Sanders

Inhofe
Gillibrand

Leahy
King

Murphy
Boxer

Franken
Heinrich

Klobuchar
Hirono

Warren
Schumer

Shaheen
Carper

Menendez
Whitehouse

Cardin
Baldwin

Peters
Schatz

Blumenthal
Durbin

Brown