

March 19, 2018

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Congress  
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS & Education  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Congress  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As your Subcommittee considers Fiscal Year 2019 appropriations, we urge you to **maintain level funding for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program administered by the Department of Education**, authorized in the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA). IAL provides competitive awards to school libraries and national not-for-profit organizations, including partnerships that reach families outside of local education agencies (LEAs) and 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 ensure that children enter school ready to learn and best positioned for success.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2012, 126 IAL grants have been awarded to non-profit organizations and school districts across every region of the US. Some examples of IAL grant activities include:

- Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, NC, Schools (WSFCS) received an Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant to support school librarians implementing technology tools 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 as well as supporting 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. Reach Out and Read leveraged the existing healthcare infrastructure to promote early literacy and language development among children in 16 counties. In Year 2 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 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.

Access to high-quality literacy programming and resources remains a critical component of early childhood literacy. For American families living in poverty and limited to the services of high-need local educational authorities, access to quality reading materials and adequate learning facilities is prohibitive, fostering chronic disadvantages for already underserved youth.

The 114<sup>th</sup> Congress took important steps in supporting the needs of disadvantaged students by providing IAL authorization through the passage of ESSA and funding through appropriations since 2012. From Alaska, to New York, and Kentucky to California, this important appropriation provides funding for initiatives that include book distribution, early literacy services, technological integration and support for literacy activities, professional development for educators, culturally responsive literacy workshops for parents/families, and effective school library programs.

We ask you to maintain this investment in the Fiscal Year 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress

Don Young  
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

Tom MacArthur  
Member of Congress