

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chair
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 2021 appropriations, we urge you to increase funding for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant program administered by the Department of Education. In the most recent competition for IAL there were 145 applications reviewed but funding only allowed for 40 to be funded. With a new completion planned for Fiscal Year 2021, an increase would ensure that more communities would benefit from IAL awards to school libraries as well as national not-for-profit organizations that support literacy outside of school. By providing age-appropriate books, supporting parental engagement programs, and reinforcing professional development, the IAL program helps strengthen literacy skills to ensure that children enter school ready to learn and continue to be 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 US. Some examples of IAL grant activities include:

Local Education Agencies/School Libraries-

- Three largely rural school districts in Alaska were awarded IAL grants in the 2018 grant cycle. The Bering Strait School District grant targets children between the ages of one to four through book distribution, educator training, and parent/child literacy workshops. Its library is also distributing education kits to students in grades K-8. Hydaburg City School District is using its grant to modernize and expand its library books, resources (including technology), and program offerings. Yukon-Koyukuk School District received a grant to create programs for motivating young readers, modernizing its library collection, and training librarians and educators in literacy skills support.

National Non-Profit Organizations-

- With a 2016 grant, Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) partnered with the Kentucky Education Development Corporation to support participating schools through access to books, resources, and training resulting in improved student performance in literacy

- In 2014, 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. In the latest round of grants, several school districts in Texas (Southwest, Charlotte, Cuero, and Brownsville ISDs) and Oklahoma (Idabel) have incorporated the Reach Out and Read model in their 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. With flat funding over the last five years, we ask that you prioritize IAL by increasing the investment to \$30 million in the Fiscal Year 2021 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

Thank you for your attention to, and consideration of, this important request, and we look forward to working with you to increase the literacy and achievement of our nation's young people.

Sincerely,

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Doug Jones
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator