

February 27, 2012

The Honorable George Miller
Ranking Member, House Education and the Workforce Committee
United States Congress
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Miller,

Advocates for Literacy, a coalition of organizations dedicated to the development of comprehensive literacy strategies at the state and federal level, endorses the amendment being offered by members of the Committee to establish an independent funding stream supporting state-wide efforts to improve literacy among the nation's children and youth. The Coalition does not support the approach taken in HR 3990, the *Encouraging Innovation and Effective Teachers Act*, which proposes a block grant to states without specific purpose areas to ensure the most disadvantaged students and schools receive dedicated resources in critical areas of need, such as literacy instruction. Without a targeted funding stream to improve literacy, our nation will not remain globally competitive and the needs of our most at-risk students to succeed in school and after graduation will not be met.

Literacy is the cornerstone of critical state improvement efforts to advance college- and career-readiness, improve educator effectiveness, and align language and literacy development with rigorous English language arts state standards. Literacy outcomes are linked to workforce competitiveness, and higher-order literacy skills such as the ability to analyze text and write using critical reasoning are essential to academic and work success. The nation has long struggled to strengthen the literacy skills of its students. More than two-thirds of the nation's fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders score below proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and these students are disproportionately poor and students of color. Over 5 million high school students do not read well enough to understand their grade level material, and American fifteen-year-olds rank fourteenth among developed nations in reading, lagging behind such countries as Poland, Estonia, and Iceland.

Low literacy achievement not only impacts student performance in elementary and secondary school; it also prevents students from succeeding in college courses. If American high schools graduated all students ready for college, the United States would save more than \$3.7 billion a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that almost a third of all entering college freshmen in 2000, the most recent year with data available, had to enroll in remedial courses.

Currently, the federal government is investing in a comprehensive birth through grade 12 literacy strategy through the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program. Forty-eight states received formula funding in 2010 to create their own state literacy teams, and a competitive grant process in 2011 built on that initial investment by providing funds to help states implement these plans. The Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program has provided states with the

resources to plan and integrate activities, along with the development of activities that are specific to each states needs. Unfortunately, HR 3990 eliminates this promising program despite the fact that such interventions are necessary because to be successful in the twenty-first century requires skills that an earlier generation never imagined. What students need to know and do to be ready for higher education, work, and civic life is much more demanding than it once was. Creating globally competent graduates requires high level reading and writing skills, and these skills are prerequisites for success in other high-growth fields, including science and technology.

We strongly urge the Committee to work on bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which includes a separate funding stream dedicated to state-driven comprehensive literacy instruction. Literacy is at the heart of our nation's competitiveness, and we owe it to future generations to ensure that our students can read and write successfully. America must invest in literacy.

Sincerely yours,

Alliance for Excellent Education
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
First Focus Campaign for Children
The Grimes Reading Institute
HighScope Educational Research Foundation
International Reading Association
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council of Teachers of English
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
National Title I Association
National Writing Project
Nemours
Parent-Child Home Program
Reading Recovery Council of North America
TESOL International Association