

April 15, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, and Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, and Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Vice-Chairman Cochran:

We ask that you join us in our support for the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), and provide this valuable program with its fully authorized funding level of \$300 million in fiscal year (FY) 2011.

As you well know, rural schools face unique challenges associated with geographic isolation and limited enrollments. Unfortunately, federal formula programs do not provide rural schools with adequate funding to carry out many of the programmatic requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Also, rural districts often do not benefit from competitive grant programs because they lack the capacity to apply.

Congress authorized REAP within NCLB to assist rural districts in supporting highly successful schools. Today, REAP remains the only federal program dedicated to helping rural schools overcome their unique challenges. In addition to providing rural school districts with formula grants, REAP also allows small, rural school districts to combine funds through REAP-Flex.

The utility of REAP is illustrated by the demand for this program. In the 2009/2010 school year, 4,093 school districts in 42 states leveraged over \$86 million through the Small, Rural Schools Achievement Program and 1,497 school districts in 41 states benefited from over \$85 million through the Rural and Low-Income School Program. Districts use this funding to support classroom technology, distance learning, professional development, and other innovative strategies.

REAP is intended to provide a dedicated stream of funding to rural school districts. The program's formula funding and flexibility have allowed qualified districts to more easily manage successful schools. Going forward, we urge the Committee to ensure REAP-qualified school districts are awarded this funding through formulas determined by Congress. Should ESEA be reauthorized with more emphasis on competition, formula funding for REAP will be even more critical to filling in gaps created by competitive funding streams.

We understand the budget challenges you face in crafting appropriations legislation. However, Congress has a long history of support for REAP, and has funded the program each year since its creation. It is our sincere hope that you will continue this support and increase funding for this vital program to \$300 million.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

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