



December 18, 2013

Dear Member of Congress,

The undersigned national associations represent the major K-12 education organizations dedicated to improving public education in our nation's public schools. We thank you for your recent efforts, through the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2013, to restore a large portion of the very damaging sequester cuts, which had reduced federal investment in education to pre-2004 levels. As Congress moves forward with the remaining work of the FY14 appropriations process, we urge the Appropriations Committees to write Labor-HHS-Education funding bills that prioritize key federal education programs that are crucial to helping our most disadvantaged students, specifically Title I LEA grants and IDEA Part B grants at levels not less than pre-sequestration cuts of 2013.

Investment in public education is one of the single most effective ways to not only help students succeed in an increasingly competitive global workplace, but also a way to help stabilize and grow the nation's economy. Investment in public education makes fiscal and policy sense in both the short and long term, as dollars invested in education have a return on investment unrivaled by other areas of the federal budget. The BBA is a welcome return to the annual appropriations process and away from reliance on continuing resolutions, which tie the hands of Congress to determine where and how to allocate changes in federal funding levels.

As Congress moves forward with its work to finalize FY14 appropriations levels, we write to convey our strong support for investment in these federal flagship formula programs designed to level the playing field and support historically disadvantaged populations. Our groups urge you to prioritize federal education investment in the ESEA Title I LEA program for disadvantaged children and the IDEA Part B program for students with disabilities, long-standing federal commitments that support schools in all states and help offset the damage related to recent cuts, which have fallen especially hard on students most in need of extra support.

While the BBA allows for the restoration of the bulk of sequester-related cuts, overall funding still lags pre-recession levels. Given the limited nature of federal funding, we caution against diluting the potential of federal investment by focusing on non-formula funding for a narrow set of recipients, or funding new initiatives at the expense of Title I and IDEA. Federal dollars represent, on average, just over ten percent of the average school district's operating budget. This is a relatively small but very critical share of funding that is best leveraged to bolster student learning when it is available through predictable formula allocations that support the neediest of students. While we understand the interest in supporting other programs and proposals, our nation, its schools and the students they serve cannot afford to see these key programs under Title I and IDEA placed on the back burner.

We write to convey the importance of concentrating the limited federal dollars on the programs that have the biggest impact on school district budgets and at-risk students. Budget recommendations and appropriations have shortchanged critical K-12 education programs for too many years. It is time to reaffirm the federal government's commitment to equity and excellence through programs that best address the needs of the nation's public schools and neediest students. We look forward to working with you to complete a robust FY14 LHHS-Education appropriations bill that courageously returns the focus of federal education investment to Title I and IDEA.

Sincerely,

AASA: The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers
Council of Great City Schools
National Education Association
National School Boards Association