

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
and Education  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

May 18, 2016

Dear Senator Murray:

The undersigned Washington and regional organizations urge you to request the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education Appropriations Subcommittee provide robust funding for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (SSAEG), Title IV, Part A of the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The undersigned organizations represent teachers, principals, counselors, school social workers, and numerous well-rounded education stakeholder groups who join together in the belief that SSAEG funds will help Washington schools ensure barriers to learning are reduced and all students have the benefit of a rich educational experience.

The SSAEG program is authorized at \$1.65 billion for FY 2017. The grants are the result of Congress's decision to consolidate more than 20 mostly competitive programs into a single formula-funded flexible block grant program. The program allows districts to choose where best to spend their SSAEG dollars in order to help all students develop the skills essential for learning readiness and academic success. These programs include safe and healthy students activities, such as providing mental health services to students; increased student access to STEM, computer science and accelerated learning courses, physical education, art, music, foreign languages, and college and career counseling; support for effective school library programs; and, access for students to technology and digital materials and for educators to technology professional development opportunities.

In Washington, these dollars are critical to ensuring student success. These funds are desperately needed in our state, particularly given the underfunding of basic education. By providing programs promoting and addressing good physical and mental health, students will have greater academic success. Ensuring our students are proficient in technologies will prepare them for 21st century jobs. Funding from these grants could help to support school counselors, who play a key role in delivering the academic and social-emotional support services that many of our struggling students need to overcome the barriers they face. It could also help to support students with specific needs related to mental health, and pay for food and even clothing that is needed to ensure they stay in school.

The president's FY 2017 budget request includes only \$500 million, less than one-third the authorized funding level agreed to by Congress and the president a short time ago. We believe this funding level would have devastating consequences in school districts across the state. For example, Tacoma Public Schools would receive \$1.17 million in FY17 if Title IV, part A receives full funding, but would only receive \$289,000 should the President's budget

proposal become law. We respectfully request that Congress provide a funding level more closely aligned with the goals and spirit of the law.

Beyond the financial challenges of such a low funding level, the amount proposed in the president's budget for SSAEG will seriously hamper Washington's ability to make meaningful investments in a range of programs that, when combined, improve conditions for learning and allow students access to a well-rounded education. It would force school districts to choose between high-quality programs that positively impact students in different ways, for example, trading off school counseling services for Advanced Placement programs. This is in direct opposition to Congress's intent to provide greater flexibility for districts and schools.

We also object to the Administration's proposal to make funding competitive from the state to local school districts. Congress intended that all school districts benefit from these funds. Under a competitive grant structure, under-resourced, rural school districts will be at a disadvantage, as they lack the same capacity as larger school districts to apply for funding. Sufficiently funding this program eliminates any need for prescriptive language about targeting and increases local control and choice over investments made in education programs. Most importantly, underfunding this program in its first year would severely hinder effective implementation and will likely lead to cuts and lower appropriations in future years.

On behalf of Washington's students, parents, and educators, we urge you to appropriate full funding for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. Please contact Megan Wolfe, Manager, Public Policy-Advocacy at ASCD, at [megan.wolfe@ascd.org](mailto:megan.wolfe@ascd.org), with any questions.

Sincerely,

Northwest Council for Computer Education  
Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling  
Society of Health & Physical Educators – Washington  
Washington Association For Language Teaching (WAFLT)  
Washington Association of School Social Workers  
Washington Association of Secondary Principals (WASSP)  
Washington Library Media Association WLMA  
Washington Music Educators Association  
Washington School Counselor Association  
Washington Science Teachers Association  
Washington State ASCD  
Washington State Association of School Psychologists

Cc: Hon. Thad Cochran, Barbara Mikulski, Roy Blunt, Jerry Moran, Richard Shelby, Lindsey Graham, Mark Kirk, Bill Cassidy, Shelley Moore-Capito, James Lankford, Dick Durbin, Jack Reed, Jeanne Shaheen, Jeff Merkley, Brian Schatz, Tammy Baldwin