

September 7, 2010

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Department Priorities

Attention: Department Priorities Comments
Office of Innovation and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Room 3W329
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Secretary Duncan:

The undersigned organizations offer the following response to the notice of proposed Priorities for Discretionary Grant Programs. As a coalition of education groups that support a comprehensive national, state, and local literacy policy that will provide all children—from birth through grade twelve—with the reading and writing skills necessary for success in school and beyond, we urge you to make literacy an intentional and explicit priority.

Literacy skills are the foundation for many of the current proposed priorities, including improving early learning outcomes; increasing postsecondary success; and ensuring success in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). We applaud the inclusion of “language and literacy development” in Priority 1 because the explicit mention of literacy highlights its foundational value in children’s readiness for school. We recommend two ways to assure attention to literacy in every program proposal: (1) the inclusion of similar explicit language in other priorities and/or (2) the inclusion of Priority 14, Increasing Literacy for All Students.

A. Inclusion of Explicit Language about Literacy in Other Priorities

The following elements could be added into proposed priorities so that grant programs will be certain to include attention to fostering literacy.

Priority 2: (a) The development or implementation of literacy instructional materials that enable students to demonstrate their learning to meet standards

Priority 3: (c) Increasing the number of effective and highly effective teachers or principals who serve as instructional leaders, especially in the area of literacy

Priority 4: (a) Increasing the number of students who have literacy skills needed to meet school achievement goals across the curriculum

Priority 5: (a) Increasing the number of high-need students who receive instruction in literacy skills appropriate to their needs and academic goals

Priority 6: (a) Accelerating learning and helping to improve high school graduation rates through literacy instruction for high-need students

(b) Accelerating learning and helping to improve high school graduation rates through literacy instruction for students from high-poverty homes that provide little or no support for literacy development

Priority 7: (a) Providing students the literacy foundation and on-going learning that are essential for engaging successfully in STEM learning

Priority 8: (b) Projects that recognize and value diversity of language background and development in promoting increased literacy learning

Priority 10: (a) Improving instructional practices for all students through inclusion of literacy learning in all analyses of student learning

Priority 11: (a) Improving teacher effectiveness through professional development in writing, reading, participating in, and implementing evaluation studies

B. Inclusion of Priority 14: Increasing Literacy for All Students

Background: Literacy skills are a critical prerequisite to academic success in all content areas. Reading and writing are linked in developing literacy capacities applicable to learning every subject. For example, advanced literacy across content areas is the best available predictor of students' ability to succeed in introductory college courses. Students need instruction and practice in analyzing diverse texts and writing using critical reasoning.

Statement of proposed priority: Projects that are designed for increasing literacy for students at all academic levels and in all content areas:

- (a) the development of aligned literacy instruction across grade levels
- (b) the development of coordinated literacy instruction across content areas
- (c) professional development for teachers in literacy in all content areas, especially for teachers working with English Language Learners and students with disabilities
- (d) the development of instructional materials that feature higher-order literacy skills, such as the ability to analyze diverse texts and to write using critical reasoning

Our organizations are strongly supportive of changes in the Priorities for Discretionary Grant Programs that will recognize the central position of literacy in student learning. We appreciate your consideration of our suggestions and look forward to changes in the Priorities that will highlight the importance of literacy.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE)
International Reading Association (IRA)
Knowledge Alliance
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
Reading Recovery Council of North America, Inc.