March 14, 2016

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee of Labor, HHS, Education and
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee of Labor, HHS, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As the Subcommittee begins its consideration of the fiscal year (FY) 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, we urge the Subcommittee to maintain the Senate’s commitment to supporting a safe, healthy, and well-rounded education for all students. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law on December 10, 2015, included a $1.65 billion authorization level for the Student Support & Academic Enrichment Grant program (Title IV, Part A). The President’s budget requests only $500 million in funding for this program, however, we believe it is the intent of the 85 Senators and 359 House members who voted for the Every Student Succeeds Act that this program be funded at the requested authorization level.

While we are aware of the current budget challenges, Congress conveyed a strong message about the importance of funding the wide array of activities and programs available under the new Student Support & Academic Enrichment Grant program. The data are clear that to best support the academic success of our children, they must feel secure, supported and engaged in their school environment. Assisting states in making meaningful updates in technology, increasing opportunities to provide a well-rounded education, and implementing locally-tailored programs to reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices are just a few of the activities supported under this grant program. We have all heard from parents, educators, and students in our states who understand that students need access to a comprehensive education to compete successfully in the 21st century global marketplace.

The programs covered under the Student Support & Academic Enrichment Grant program will foster a balanced 21st century learning environment. Moreover, they will support the principle that a well-rounded curriculum should never be a luxury reserved for some, but a necessity available to all. We also urge you to maintain this program as a formula grant, rather than follow the President’s budget proposal to allow funding to be awarded competitively. Congress intended for these federal funds to be awarded to states and school districts based on Title I-A eligibility to ensure that all schools receive their fair share of resources.
We appreciate your ongoing commitment to elementary and secondary education and ask that you continue to support our children by honoring the Senate’s commitment to the Student Support & Academic Enrichment Grant program. Specifically, we ask that you maintain the authorized level of funding for this program at $1.65 billion in the FY 2017 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

Orrin Hatch  
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

Kelly A. Ayotte  
United States Senator

Al Franken  
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator