



August 10, 2006

The Honorable Tom Harkin
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

As debate continues on the Fiscal Year 2007 Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations bill, we would like to ask for your support for providing greater flexibility in leveraging both the four percent Title I set-aside and the new School Improvement Grant funds at the state level. The enclosed letter sent to Senator Specter by Tom Houlihan of CCSSO does a good job of summarizing the issue broadly. We would like to provide you with an Iowa perspective on this issue.

Iowa has used the state's School Improvement Grant 4% set-aside to develop a statewide system of support for Title I Schools in Need of Assistance (Improvement). Two co-facilitators from the Iowa Department of Education worked with representatives from the intermediate service units (AEAs) to design a five-phase process to assist identified and sanctioned schools. These AEA representatives have become the Statewide Support Team for SINA buildings. The Statewide Support Team meets quarterly in a central location for professional development related to school improvement. Teams supporting each phase of the process within this group interact and collaborate to assure a systems approach. This team has members from across the state with expertise in curriculum, assessment, data analysis, leadership, professional development, and other educational needs. They continually refine the five phases to meet the needs of Iowa schools.

In the audit phase, a wide variety of data is collected and analyzed. In the diagnosis phase, tools are used to determine specific areas for improvement. In the design phase, a two-year action plan is created for the purpose of meeting building goals for academic improvement. In the implementation phase, schools implement the action plan with on-going assistance from the Statewide Support Team. In the evaluation phase, the school reviews the progress toward the completion of and success with the action plan.

The Iowa Support Team has been a very dedicated and hard-working group of educational professionals. The assistance that identified schools have received

from the team members has been very well received. Some schools that are not identified have requested the opportunity to go through the process. At present, with a small number of schools identified, school improvement allocations to individual buildings are substantial enough for schools to utilize the funds effectively toward the completion of their action plans. However, as the number of identified schools inevitably grows, small school improvement allocations to buildings will have less impact. If more of the federal School Improvement Grant set-aside funds could be utilized at the state level, the support of the this statewide team could be extended to a larger constituency at the regional level. Building capacity in this fashion would make it possible for schools on the watch list or schools that wish to be proactive in preventing identification to access assistance in this arena.

These funds would be less effective if distributed to each district. By pooling resources, the state is providing a valuable service to SINA and other schools as they seek to improve service to students. We would ask that you support the Administration's request to override the current hold-harmless provision to enable states to reserve the full 4% set-aside on a proportional basis from all Title I districts. In Iowa, this means those funds will be used to provide services directly to the neediest districts and schools.

We also ask that you support allowing the new School Improvement Grant funds to exist apart from the expectations in Section 1003 of the statute. This again will allow for needed pooling of limited resources to most directly impact the schools that need the most assistance.

With this additional, stable, school improvement funding, SEAs could make a long-term commitment to statewide, coordinated support of SINA and other schools. We greatly appreciate your attention to this issue and thank you for your long-standing support of educators in Iowa and across the nation. If you or your staff have any questions or would like additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judy Jeffrey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Judy Jeffrey
Director
Iowa Department of Education