

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 18, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, and
Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, and
Education, and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran:

We are writing to respectfully request that you provide the highest fiscally responsible increase in funding for the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program (ESSCP) in the fiscal year 2010 appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. Authorized under Title V, Part D, Subpart 2 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. §7245), ESSCP is the only federal program that allocates funding to provide school districts with resources to offer comprehensive counseling services that are critical in our schools.

Since initial passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, the federal government has made a commitment to providing financial assistance to states, local school districts, and individual schools to help improve educational opportunities for low income and disadvantaged students. ESSCP is a valuable ESEA program that assists in this effort to improve education opportunities by providing funding for expanded counseling services for students. Professionals like school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists provide crucial daily academic and social services to elementary and high school students. Their work with students helps to remove emotional and mental impediments to learning and with the support that these school counseling professionals provide, students are better prepared to engage with the academic content presented and interact more positively with peers and adults. Having qualified school social workers, counselors, and school psychologists active in a school community can also lead to fewer absences, fewer discipline referrals, and higher academic achievement. Increased ESSCP funding in fiscal year 2010 will help provide additional services to an even larger number of students.

As you know, the ESSCP's statutory language contains a funding trigger directing the Department of Education to award ESSCP grants only to elementary school programs unless the funding for ESSCP surpasses \$40 million. Under your leadership, Congress appropriated sufficient funds to ESSCP to exceed the statutory trigger for the first time in fiscal year 2008, and again met the trigger by appropriating \$52 million in fiscal year 2009. The fiscal years 2008 and 2009 appropriations ensured that secondary school programs were able to participate in the ESSCP program and helped to extend the benefits of ESSCP resources to our nation's middle and high school students. Because school counseling professionals play such a vital role in boosting student achievement, it is absolutely critical that we provide enough funding to ESSCP to make certain that the funds benefit secondary schools in order to help assist in

benefits of ESSCP resources to our nation's middle and high school students. Because school counseling professionals play such a vital role in boosting student achievement, it is absolutely critical that we provide enough funding to ESSCP to make certain that the funds benefit secondary schools in order to help assist in ongoing local, state, and national efforts to raise the high school graduation rates for all our nation's students. We urge you to provide increased appropriations to ESSCP not only to meet the statutory trigger again, but also to provide as many ESSCP resources as possible to both our elementary and secondary schools.

A wide range of school counseling programs like college and guidance counseling, school social work services, and school psychological services fulfill a vital role in American public education and supplement the important academic work that takes place in our nation's classrooms by providing valuable guidance and support to students and their families through academic and social programming. These school counseling professionals help to ensure that our schools meet the educational needs of the whole child, including students' social and health needs as well as academic needs. Unfortunately, this nation still has a long way to go in providing adequate pupil services to our nation's students. School social workers, school psychologists, and school counselors operate in very challenging work environments with heavy caseloads. Because of lack of funding and staff, only about one in five students who needs mental health services receives them. According to the American School Counselor Association, the recommended student-to-counselor ratio is 250 to 1, but in reality, the average student-to-counselor ratio now approaches 476 to 1. The recommended student-to-school social worker ratio is 400 to 1, but in many states, the number of students that social workers provide services to exceeds that ratio. The National Association of School Psychologists' Guidelines recommend a student-to-school psychology service staff ratio no higher than 1000 to 1, a ratio that data suggests is exceeded in the majority of states. Local, state, and federal resources will all be necessary to lower the student-to-pupil service provider ratios and ESSCP funds are critical to those ongoing efforts.

In order to close the pervasive achievement and graduation rate gaps that exists in this nation and improve the quality of education for all of America's children, regardless of their background, much more needs to be done to improve our nation's schools. Providing increases in the ESSCP fiscal year 2010 funding is one way that we can continue efforts to improve the quality of educational services provided to all of America's children.

Thank you for your commitment to this program and your attention to this request.

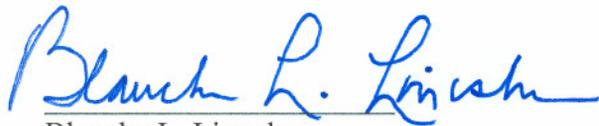
Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold
U.S. Senator



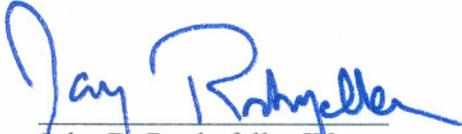
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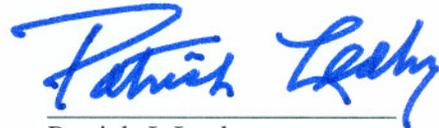
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Carl Levin
U.S. Senator



Michael F. Bennet
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Christopher J. Dodd
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