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To
The Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
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The National Education Knowledge Industry Association (NEKIA) presents its recommendations for FY 2008 funding for a number of critical research-based school improvement programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

Increase funding for the research and development and knowledge use programs

- Comprehensive Centers -- *Request:* \$66.8 million (\$10.5 million increase)
- Regional Education Laboratories -- *Request:* \$75.5 million (\$10 million increase)
- Research, Development, and Dissemination -- *Request:* \$182 million (\$20 million increase)
- National Research and Development Centers -- *Request:* \$26 million, as required
- Title I School Improvement Grants -- *Request:* \$500 million (\$374 million increase)

Continue support for the following programs in the President's budget request

- Teacher Quality State Grants
- 21st Century Learning Centers
- Math Science Partnership
- Reading First
- Special Education Research
- Statewide Data Systems
- Striving Readers
- Title I formula grants

Reinstate the following programs proposed for elimination in the President's budget

- Comprehensive School Reform
- Even Start
- Parental Information Resource Centers
- Technology State Grants
- Smaller Learning Communities
- State Grants for Innovative Programs

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Good afternoon. I am Steve Fleischman, Vice President, Education and Human Development at American Institutes for Research (AIR) in Washington, DC. For the past 60 years AIR, one of the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan social science research firms, has established a track record of providing the highest quality research and evidence-based technical assistance to support sustained school improvement. It is my pleasure and honor to present this testimony on behalf of the National Education Knowledge Industry Association (NEKIA) of which AIR is an active member. As a member of NEKIA's Executive Committee, I would like you to know that my remarks represent the views of NEKIA's leadership and Board of Directors.

NEKIA appreciates this opportunity to present to the Subcommittee our recommendations for FY 2008 funding for a number of programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

NEKIA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan trade association dedicated to expanding the use of research-based knowledge in policy and practice in K-12 education. We are a strong and dynamic community of highly successful education organizations and agencies, all of which are constantly looking for new and better ways to support high quality education research, development, dissemination, technical assistance and evaluation at the federal, regional, state, tribal and local levels.

Much of our collective work is focused on advancing the effective use of research-based knowledge as a central organizing concept for school improvement and education reform. We firmly believe that the effective use of research-based knowledge can significantly enhance and accelerate the nationwide efforts to improve academic performance and close achievement gaps in K-12 education. Effective knowledge use also helps advance the national initiatives to transform education into an evidence-based field and enhance the proper implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA). In particular, we note that one of NCLB's cornerstones is developing research-based solutions to the problem of low student achievement.

For the following critical reasons, NEKIA believes it is now time to intensify the focus on creating, translating and applying research-based knowledge into useful tools to improve instructional practices in low-performing schools:

There is an increasing demand for knowledge-based solutions — In 2005, more than 24,000 U.S. public schools were not making adequate yearly progress, and over 10,000 schools were designated as in need of improvement under the NCLB. Many more schools are on the cusp of this designation, and deserve additional support. To fulfill the promise of NCLB, much greater attention needs to be directed to delivering research-based solutions to these schools in need.

Federal investment in education R&D is inadequate to meet current and future needs — NCLB requires educators to use instructional practices and innovations supported by research, but the Department of Education spends less than one percent of its budget on research, development and statistics, the smallest of any cabinet level agency. This low level of investment means that not only will schools and districts continue to find it difficult to fulfill NCLB’s mandate for using such practices, but that they will not be able to build the evidence base needed by educators to achieve the improvements envisioned by NCLB. The bottom line is that schools and students will suffer without an increased investment in developing and testing research-based practices.

There is an escalating capacity crisis — A 2006 report by the nonpartisan Center on Education Policy (CEP) found that there is a growing capacity crisis at the state and local levels to support schools in need of improvement. We agree with CEP’s assessment that “...the Department and the Congress should (provide) more funding and ... other types of support to help strengthen states’ and districts’ capacity to assist schools identified for improvement. Many states and districts lack sufficient funds, staff, or expertise to help improve all identified schools...” A national study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes also found that this crisis is further exacerbated by state education agencies’ very low capacity to evaluate education programs that are carried out at the state and district levels.

There is a weak link between the federal research enterprise and federal school improvement efforts — NCLB stimulates and shapes greater demand for research-based knowledge solutions through its accountability and sanctioning provisions, and ESRA aims to increase the supply of research-based knowledge through its investments in research and development. There are numerous provisions in NCLB and ESRA regarding the use of scientifically-based research for school improvement purposes, but the links between supply and demand of evidence have not been fully developed and remain functionally weak.

There is an urgent need to take the next essential step in standards-based reform — Federal education policy has evolved in phases over the past 15 years. The focus on standards and assessments in the late 1980s and early 1990s spawned major attention on the alignment of standards, curriculum and assessments in the 1990s, which played a role in the current emphasis on accountability. The next logical step in this standards-based continuum is a more comprehensive and vigorous focus on school improvement — one that provides significant new resources and expertise targeted both to turning around low performing schools and to building a knowledge-based capacity and infrastructure for sustained improvement.

NEKIA’s appropriations proposal for FY 2008 calls for greater federal investments in research-based programs to help states and districts respond to the rapidly increasing needs of low-performing schools. Specifically, we urge funding for federal education programs that explicitly support knowledge use in school improvement, or have a strong potential to do so. Further, we urge a stronger and more comprehensive federal effort to respond both to the greater demand for knowledge-based solutions and to the under-funded supply of well-tested practices and programs. Specifically we propose the following:

Increase investments in the following programs for expanding and strengthening the school improvement infrastructure nationwide. Through these programs, research-based knowledge will be effectively created, translated and applied to boost student achievement and close the achievement gaps.

- Comprehensive Centers *Request:* \$66.8 million (\$10.5 million increase over FY 2007). The Comprehensive Centers provide intensive technical assistance for increasing the capacity of State Educational Agencies (SEAs) to implement key research-based school improvement provisions in NCLB. The system includes 16 regional centers that work directly with SEAs and five content centers to provide in depth, research-based knowledge in key improvement areas (assessment and accountability, instruction, teacher quality, innovation and improvement and high schools). The recommended increase would support an average \$500,000 increase per center, enabling them to intensify their research-based services and the regional centers to help states respond directly to increasing numbers of schools in need of improvement and corrective action.
- Regional Education Laboratories *Request:* \$75.5 million (\$10 million increase over FY 2007). The Regional Educational Laboratory Program consists of a network of ten laboratories that serve the education reform and school improvement needs of designated regions. The laboratories provide access to high quality scientifically valid research through applied research and development projects, studies and related technical assistance activities. The recommended increase would support an average \$1 million increase per agency that could be used to create a special “urgent response” system to address pressing educational reform problems identified by the laboratory governing boards in each region.
- Research, Development, and Dissemination *Request:* \$182 million (\$20 million increase over FY 2007). This fund supports a small but diverse portfolio of programs, projects and studies that create, translate, disseminate and/or apply research-based knowledge relevant to school improvement and implementation of NCLB. Ongoing initiatives cover key issue areas including academic subjects, teacher quality, cognition and learning, reading and math. The fund includes discretionary grants and contracts for directed and field-initiated research, including eight national research and development centers. This recommendation would increase the number of rigorous research studies focusing on pressing school improvement issues by at least 20.
- National Research and Development Centers *Request:* \$26 million, as required. The centers address enduring issues of national significance in education through a sustained, focused, interdisciplinary program of research. Much of the centers’ work contributes to building the capacity of SEAs and LEAs for addressing the needs of low-performing schools. The centers are funded through an annual allocation within the Research Development and Dissemination fund determined by the Institute of Education Sciences. The requested \$26 million allocation requirement to this program in FY 2008 would provide supplemental grants of up to \$2 million to eligible centers for expanding the size or number of rigorous research studies on their designated topics.

- Title I School Improvement Grants *Request: \$500 million (\$374 million increase over FY 2007)*. Newly funded in FY 2007, this program supports state level school improvement activities directed at schools and districts that have not met adequate yearly progress for at least two years. The President's request would build state capacity to lead LEA and school improvement, and would provide additional resources to LEAs to support school improvement activities, including the development and implementation of effective restructuring plans. NEKIA strongly supports the request of \$500 million.

Support the President's FY 2008 budget request for the following programs, which play a significant role in state and local efforts to respond to the increased demand.

- Improving Teacher Quality State Grants *Funding Request: \$2.9 billion*
- Twenty-first Century Learning Centers *Funding Request: \$981 million*
- Math Science Partnerships *Funding Request: \$182 million*
- Reading First *Funding Request: \$1.136 billion*
- Special Education Research and Evaluation programs *Funding Request: \$82 million*
- Statewide Data Systems *Funding Request: \$49.2 million*
- Striving Readers *Funding Request: \$100 million*
- Title I formula grants *Funding Request: \$13.9 billion*

Reinstate the following programs which were proposed for elimination in the President's FY 2008 budget request.

- Comprehensive School Reform *\$7 million*
- Even Start *\$111.6 million*
- Parental Information and Resource Centers *\$39 million*
- Technology State Grants *\$270 million*
- Smaller Learning Communities *\$90.4 million*
- State Grants for Innovative Programs *\$99 million*

The following are illustrative examples of effective research-based school improvement work done through the programs I have just mentioned:

Regional Educational Laboratories — The Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest has been called upon to conduct an impact study on a promising reading program in Montana called Project CRISS: Creating Independence Through Student Owned Strategies. Created in Kalispell, Montana over 20 years ago, the program helps teachers apply research-based learning principles to improving adolescent reading comprehension. While the anecdotal results have been promising over the years, the program has never been evaluated using rigorous “gold standard” scientific research methodologies. This is where the laboratory is able to help. The lab is conducting a five year, randomized study to measure the program's effectiveness, offer refinements to the model, and potentially expand the model nationwide.

Comprehensive Centers — One component of the State of California's strategy to help low-performing schools is to provide technical assistance through state-approved providers. To support these providers, the California Comprehensive Center (CA CC) at WestEd has developed a model to help districts simplify budgeting processes — aligning yearly budgets with goals for student achievement. This work is giving financially-strapped districts a workable

structure to connect budgets to academic priorities. The new tools will allow California districts to focus more resources on helping those students most in need.

National R&D Centers — The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST) is using multiple methods to validate the promising after school practices of sites located in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, New York and Pennsylvania (among others). Findings are being used to create training and web-based tools to help after school programs across the country to implement more effective interventions in reading, math, arts, homework help and technology. The project is being conducted in collaboration with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory and the National Partnership for Afterschool Learning, which also brings together and benefits from the collective reach of numerous other R&D organizations around the country.

Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center — I am pleased that in addition to my other duties, from 2003-2006, I served as AIR's director for this just completed project. The Center produced a series of scientifically based consumer guides that reviewed and rated the evidence of quality and effectiveness of nearly 50 of the most widely adopted whole school reform programs in the country. These reports provide the ratings and in-depth information that education decision-makers need to sort through their school reform options. This information will be particularly important as more schools are identified as in need of improvement.

NEKIA is heartened by the continuing interest and support that Congress has shown for many of these knowledge use programs. As well, we are pleased that the President is demonstrating increased support for a number of the programs we have highlighted. NEKIA believes that if we are to ensure even greater success for all our children, we must increase the federal investment in knowledge use efforts.

We appreciate your consideration of our proposals and welcome the opportunity to work with you to ensure better outcomes for all schools and students through research-based knowledge use in education.