



December 18, 2013

Dear Congress Member,

On behalf of the National Rural Education Association (NREA), the National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition (NREAC), the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA) and AASA: The School Superintendents Association, we write to urge the Appropriations Committees to write Labor-HHS-Education funding bills that prioritize key federal education programs like Title I and IDEA. Our groups represent local education organizations committed to supporting and advancing federal education policies that enhance education opportunities for our nation's schools and the students they serve, with an additional focus on the unique opportunities and obstacles that come with running schools in rural communities.

Our groups have been unified and consistent in advocating against the recent cuts of sequestration, given the deeply negative impact the cuts had on education and the very disproportionate nature of the impact on rural schools, where federal dollars often represent an above-average share of overall operating budgets. We strongly support and applaud your recent efforts to restore a large portion of the damaging sequester cuts through the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013.

Congress has historically prioritized its K12 expenditures on flagship formula programs designed to level the playing field for our most disadvantaged students, including Title I and IDEA. Federal dollars represent, on average, roughly ten percent of a school district's operating budget. In rural communities this share is often higher, meaning that cuts in federal investment are felt much deeper. Even with the restoration of most of the sequester cuts, overall funding still lags. As Congress grapples with allocating FY14 funding, including the restored cuts, it is absolutely imperative that the funding priority remain on Title I and IDEA and that the federal investment not be redirected to non-formula or other programmatic proposals, including Race to the Top.

Our groups are concerned with the continued reliance on competitive grants as the way to deliver federal funds to school districts and the students they serve. In a time when we regularly hear discussion of education as the civil rights issue of this generation, we are troubled with a continued effort to fund competitive programs that create a federal education funding structure of winners and losers. Especially in rural communities, the lack of access to these critical funds exacerbates—instead of addresses—resource and achievement gaps.

Our organizations, the educators we represent, and the schools and students they serve cannot afford to see key programs like Title I and IDEA placed on the back burner. Congress must ensure investments are available to all schools and students, in the programs that have the biggest impact on school district budgets and stand to best address the needs of our nation's students. We welcome the chance to work with you as Congress finalizes its FY14 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

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