

ProLiteracy Policy Update



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August 11, 2005

Family Literacy Advocates Organize Support for Even Start Appropriation

Senator Olympia Snowe (R/ME) has circulated the letter below seeking to restore funding of \$225 million for Even Start into the fiscal 2006 budget. The Senate appropriations bill that is pending approval currently does not include any funding for Even Start, although the parallel House bill includes reduced funding of \$200 million.

Senator Arlen Specter is contemplating taking the Labor, HHS, Education appropriations bill directly to Conference with the House, by-passing full Senate consideration. In the most recent conversations with the appropriations staff, it now seems more likely that the bill could be considered on the Senate floor in the latter part of September. The text of the Snowe letter is not process specific because of the fluid situation.

Senator Snowe's letter includes the following information:

The Department of Education cites compelling statistics that show these families are the most in need.

- *Even Start serves an estimated 50,000 families nationwide in 1,200 state-administrated projects.*
- *Eight-four percent of Even Start's families are at or below Federal poverty levels.*
- *Even Start families are significantly poorer than Head Start families. Nearly half of Even Start families have an annual household income under \$6,000 contrasted with only 13% of Head Start families.*
- *Further, 84% of Even Start adults do not have a high school diploma or GED; 44% of the parents have not gone beyond the 9th grade.*

Approximately 3 percent of ProLiteracy America affiliates report that they conduct family literacy programming.

For more information about Even Start, please visit the Goodling Institute Web site at http://www.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/goal_3.asp.

August XX, 2005

Hon. Thad Cochran, Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Robert C. Byrd, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Arlen Specter, Chairman
Labor, Health and Human Services, and
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Tom Harkin, Ranking Member
Labor, Health and Human Services, and
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

As you know, the Labor, HHS, and Education Subcommittee and the full Appropriations Committee have voted to eliminate funding for the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program. As you prepare for full Senate consideration, we are writing to ask that you reconsider this action and join us in supporting the only federal education program that focuses specifically on parents and their children working together to combat illiteracy. Eliminating or reducing funding will leave thousands of families in search of English language skills; as they also look to obtain jobs and support their children's education.

The Department of Education cites compelling statistics that show these families are the most in need.

- Even Start serves an estimated 50,000 families nationwide in 1,200 state-administrated projects.
- Eight-four percent of Even Start's families are at or below Federal poverty levels.
- Even Start families are significantly poorer than Head Start families. Nearly half of Even Start families have an annual household income under \$6,000 contrasted with only 13% of Head Start families.
- Further, 84% of Even Start adults do not have a high school diploma or GED; 44% of the parents have not gone beyond the 9th grade.

Nonetheless, parents participating in Even Start acquire important skills to be their child's first and most important teacher. Nothing can make up for a lack of parental support. Even Start helps parents provide that support.

The goals of *No Child Left Behind* can never be achieved if we leave the parents behind. Even Start is a good fit with Reading First, because Even Start provides the comprehensive family-parent involvement necessary for it to be successful. Over 70 percent of Even Start participants are from minority families. This program directly helps with NCLB's requirements to close the achievement gap among target populations.

In a Texas A+M University Study (2004-05) parents participating in Even Start were more often and better employed. The study found that employment jumped from 17% before enrollment to 51% after program completion; and wages increased by more than \$25%.

We ask that you join with us to support retaining current funding for Even Start at \$225 Million as it brought to the Senate floor and in Conference with the House.

Sincerely,

Olympia J. Snowe
United States Senator