



Council of the Great City Schools  
1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. ♦ Suite 702 ♦ Washington, D.C. ♦ 20004  
(202) 393-2427 ♦ (202) 393-2400 (fax)  
<http://www.cgcs.org>

September 24, 2001

The Honorable John Boehner  
Chairman, Education and the Workforce Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2181 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Council of the Great City Schools, the coalition of the nation's largest central city school districts, writes to express our grave concern over the lack of effective targeting of the nearly \$1 billion in Reading First funds. To the layman, the legislative language in Reading First gives the appearance of targeting the funds on the poorest school districts. However, the overly broad and undefined criteria actually affords the states sufficient latitude to distribute funds to virtually any community in the state. The prospect of denying these important Reading First grants to the school districts with the largest concentrations of low-income children is not only untargeted, but also unfair.

The Council has long claimed and the August 2000 report of the American Institutes for Research, "Study of Education Resources and Federal Funding," has demonstrated that state-run competitive grant programs result in less than a fair share of funds for poor, urban schools. In the critical area of reading, high poverty communities are unable to hire or retain reading teachers merely on the chance or the hope of receiving a competitive Reading First award from their state. Therefore, the Council has recommended legislative language to the Conference Committee that would ensure that the poorest school districts receive their fair share of Reading First funds, once all reading program requirements of this subpart have been clearly met.

Now, the nation's Great City Schools have fallen below the national average per pupil expenditure after decades of hovering a few dollars above the national average. Faced with the nation's most severe educational challenges, big city schools are being provided with less funds to expend on our children than the average for the nation.

The Council appreciates the statements of many of the members of the Conference Committee regarding their commitment to targeted funding, as well as the statements by the Bush Administration regarding their commitment to closing achievement gaps for poor and minority children. The Council requests that the legislative language in the Reading First program be revised to implement this commitment to targeted funding and closing achievement gaps in the poorest communities experiencing these gaps. The Council cannot support the badly needed Reading First program without changes that will produce more effective targeting.

Sincerely,

Michael Casserly  
Executive Director