

December 5, 2003

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

In 2002, working in a bipartisan manner with Congress, you signed and enacted the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). This legislation added significant new measures to ensure that all students are proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. This is a goal that our schools strongly support and one they are actively striving to meet. Our association has worked extensively with the U.S. Department of Education and the states to ensure successful implementation of the law. However, carrying out the requirements set forth in NCLB imposes a substantial financial burden on our states. Especially at a time when many states are facing their worst fiscal crises in 60 years, we believe it is critical that the administration's budget include adequate funding for the states to comply with No Child Left Behind. As your administration works to complete a FY2005 budget proposal, CCSSO offers the following recommendations:

State Assessments

Testing and accountability are the two centerpieces of the new education law. The Government Accounting Office estimates that the costs of complying with NCLB's testing requirements at between \$1.9 billion and \$5.3 billion, depending on whether states opt to use strictly multiple choice questions or a more rich combination of open ended questions and multiple choice items. Congress authorized a small fraction of that amount—\$490 million—to assist states in meeting NCLB's testing requirements. While this authorization does not cover the costs of implementation, Congress has appropriated even less than the authorized funding level. We urge the Administration to recommend funding of \$490 million for states to carry out testing requirements under NCLB in fiscal year 2005.

Long-Term Data Analysis

In order to measure the achievement and progress of students, schools and school districts, states must establish databases that track academic achievement, including test scores and graduation rates. These databases must allow for analysis of how schools are performing as a whole, how different groups of students are performing and how achievement gaps among different groups change over time. This disaggregated data is also critical to providing the required public reporting to inform parents and engage them in their children's education. Unfortunately, most states do not

have systems in place to meet these data requirements. Congress recognized this need when it created a new competitive grant program in Section 208 of the Education Sciences Reform Act. The Senate reaffirmed their commitment to the program by passing an amendment to the FY2004 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill that would have funded data systems at \$80 million. However, it now seems unlikely the amendment will be included in the final omnibus appropriations bill. Given that states need help to establish the databases NCLB requires, we urge the Administration to recommend \$200 million for this grant program in fiscal year 2005.

School Improvement Grants

The goal of measuring adequate yearly progress and identifying schools “in need of improvement” is to ensure that these schools receive the resources and technical assistance to help students succeed. NCLB requires state educational agencies to create systems that offer support and technical assistance to help reform these schools and districts, and authorizes \$500 million for School Improvement grants (Section 1002(i)). Funding for this critical purpose was appropriated in fiscal years 1999 through 2001. The discontinuation of this funding threatens technical assistance and support services just when more schools are being identified as needing improvement in accordance with the federal standards outlined in NCLB. This funding is essential to carry out activities state educational agencies must undertake to comply with NCLB. In order to make the accountability measures of NCLB meaningful, we request that the Title I School Improvement account be fully funded at a level of \$500 million in fiscal year 2005.

Enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act represented a milestone in U.S. education policy. Now Congress must support it with adequate investments in the educations—and the futures—of our children. We thank you for considering our requests and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

G. Thomas Houlihan
Executive Director

Cc: Margaret Spelling, David Dunn