April 15, 2010

The Honorable Tom Harkin  The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor
Health and Human Services, and Education Health and Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee Senate Appropriations Committee

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Cochran:

We support a renewed funding commitment for the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act in fiscal year 2011. If the United States is to remain competitive globally, we must challenge our best and brightest students to reach their full potential. Recent research analyzing NAEP and state assessment data indicates a growing “excellence gap” at the top levels of achievement between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. In fact, research indicates that it will take up to a century to close the “excellence gap” among various subgroups. It has never been a more pressing time to recommit to our investment in the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, the only federal program dedicated to addressing the unique learning needs of gifted students.

Despite the importance of education and advanced learning to global competitiveness, the Javits Act has been chronically under-funded at levels too low to fully achieve the nationwide goal of improving gifted education in America. In 2009, less than 2 cents out of every $100 of the federal K-12 education budget was devoted to meeting the needs of the nation’s gifted and talented students. We believe that it’s time our nation invests in advanced learning strategies necessary for our future prosperity. As a start, we ask that you provide at least $11.25 million for the Javits program in fiscal year 2011. This would restore Javits to its pre-2003 level, before a series of across-the-board cuts eroded the program’s reach.

The availability and quality of gifted and talented services for students varies widely between states and school districts, especially at this time of fiscal unrest when many programs are in danger of elimination. This establishes a real need for federal support, especially in the areas of research and dissemination of best practices. Although relatively small, the Javits Act positively impacts the education of gifted and talented students in every state through the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented and through competitive research and capacity building grants, activities that states and school districts simply do not have the capacity to undertake on their own. Most importantly, the Act focuses on disadvantaged gifted students who often go unnoticed and unchallenged in classrooms across the country. Research and project successes supported by the Javits Act can continue to serve as models to districts to turn this tragedy around. Many of the gifted education curriculum and instructional strategies have shown promising results. We should do more, not less, to pursue these strategies.

Congress must renew its commitment to the goal of expanding access to educational services for gifted children nationwide so that all gifted and talented students are able to realize their full potential. Again, we ask that you provide at least $11.25 million for the Javits Act for FY11.
Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Chuck Grassley
Olympia Snowe
Blanche Lincoln
Jay Rockefeller
Max Baucus
Chuck Schumer
Tom Udall
Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Chick Dodd
Susan Collins
Joe Lieber
Jeff Bingaman
Frank R. Lautenberg
Robert Menendez