June 10, 2011

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

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor
Health and Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Shelby:

We support a continued commitment to funding the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act in the Fiscal Year 2012 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Bill.

There is abundant evidence that the nation’s high-ability students are not keeping pace academically with their peers across the world. In a global economy that depends on the availability of skilled and knowledgeable workers, this is particularly troublesome. Too often, advanced ability goes unrecognized, especially for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result, many of these bright students fail to maximize their academic and intellectual potential, and their performance on state tests and other benchmarks has languished. Indeed, there has been an increasing “excellence gap” between the performance of top students from minority and low-income backgrounds compared to their more advantaged peers. At current rates of achievement, it will take decades to close some of these gaps.

Gifted and talented students have unique learning needs that require specialized instruction. Gifted students do not achieve top levels of performance or remain high performing on their own. They need to be stimulated and challenged and their intellectual talent must be developed through rigorous curriculum delivered by teachers trained to identify and support talent. Regrettably, not all school districts have leaders trained in gifted education techniques on whom teachers may rely for assistance in responding appropriately to student needs.

This information and expertise gap is hindering our ability to develop American talent to the fullest and the Javits program is the sole federal program aimed at addressing the educational needs of our high-ability students, particularly those from underserved populations. The program focuses on development and dissemination of research-based strategies and practices that districts can use to improve instruction and learning for this special population of children, and, importantly, strategies that can benefit all students in the classroom. Javits-funded research results have helped school districts to increase student achievement. We must renew our commitment to this small but effective program to ensure that our gifted and talented students are able to reach their full potential – not only for themselves, but for our future.

We request that funding for the Javits program be continued in the FY 2012 Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration of our request.
Sincerely,

Chuck Grassley
Bob Casey Jr.
Joe Sestak
Jay Rockefeller

Robert Menendez
Ron Wyden
Richard Blumenthal