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March 15, 2002

The Honorable Roderick R. Paige
Secretary of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Room 7W301
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Two of the most important new initiatives in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 are the Reading First and Early Reading First programs, and the attendant requirement that materials for them be scientifically research based. The criteria for what will qualify as scientifically research based are specified in draft Guidance issued by the Department on February 11, and it is our understanding, based on a meeting we had with Assistant Secretary Neuman and other Education Department Officials on March 1st here in Washington, D.C., that the Department believes that many reading programs are likely to meet this criteria. Many publishers are also of the view that a wide variety of their programs meet those criteria.

However, the Association of American Publishers (AAP) has received numerous reports from various states that indicate there is a wide spread misunderstanding about the number of reading programs which would qualify as scientifically research based. In fact, some USED staff have been reported as saying only one or two reading programs would qualify for Reading First funding. We believe this confusion is being caused because, at various meetings, USED officials are offering "examples" of programs they believe qualify as scientifically researched based. This appears to have created an impression amongst many state and local officials that only these programs are on the "approved" list. Such an impression has several untoward effects. First, it may deprive state and local officials from using programs which they believe better meet local needs and deprive them of the flexibility which is the foundation of federal support for education. Second, the specification of particular curricula may be at cross-purposes with the provisions of Section 9527 of H.R. 1, which forbids the Department from endorsing any particular curriculum. Finally, in addition to depriving state and local officials of flexibility now, specification of only a couple of programs may cause other program providers to refrain from materials development that would meet the needs of beginning readers even better.

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Therefore, I am requesting the Department issue a written letter of guidance on what publishers were told verbally at the March 1st meeting, that there would be no "approved list" nor would Reading First grant applications be disapproved simply because the reading program they are using. It would be useful to issue a clarifying letter within the next few days because this is the crucial time within which state and local officials are making decisions about materials for the next school year.

For your convenience, I have attached a draft of a letter which might serve as a basis for this clarification.

Thank you for your consideration. I will call to set a meeting within the next few days where we might discuss this more fully.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Schroeder". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patricia Schroeder
President

Attachment

cc: Dr. Susan Neuman