

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee

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

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that you include the highest possible funding for the Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act.

Gifted and talented students have unique learning needs that require specialized instruction, without which they do not achieve or maintain top levels of performance. Their intellectual talent must be developed through rigorous curriculum and instruction delivered by teachers trained to identify and support talent. Regrettably, not all school districts have leaders and teachers trained in gifted education.

Extensive research shows we are failing to develop advanced levels of talent in all our student populations, a trend that worsened during the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak. The achievement gap at the top of the learning spectrum has serious implications for the health of our society and our ability to compete in a global economy. The gaps between the percentage of students performing at advanced levels between different subgroups, dubbed “excellence gaps,” are not due to a lack of student ability, but rather a lack of attention to developing high achievement in every student population.

Furthermore, recent debates surrounding advanced education in communities across the country, from the existence of gifted programs to admissions at selective high schools, have led to calls for less attention to advanced learning in our schools. Yet research strongly suggests lessening our commitment to academic excellence will only increase excellence gaps, with students historically lacking access to advanced opportunities - Black, Hispanic, Native American, low-income, twice-exceptional, and rural students, among others - suffering the most.

The Javits program focuses on the very students that excellence gaps show are not receiving adequate attention. The Act funds research-based demonstration grants with a priority on identifying and serving high-ability students in underserved populations and disseminating the findings to enable schools and classrooms to improve their practice. Prior Javits grants developed high-level curriculum that is being used in disadvantaged schools across the nation; new assessments that allow schools to identify English language learners with high ability; and teacher training strategies so that general education teachers can identify students with academic potential and provide classroom support.

We must strengthen our commitment to this small but effective program. With misguided calls to eliminate advanced education in our public schools, enhancing the Javits Program to fully fund high-quality interventions, more regularly fund state-level projects to shrink excellence gaps, create a national resource center on excellence gaps, and increase projects targeted at educational leaders will send a strong message to both American citizens and the international community that we are committed to promoting academic excellence among our 56 million K-12 students.

By ensuring all our gifted and talented students are able to reach their full potential, not only will the students, their families, and their communities benefit, but our culture and economy will thrive and be globally competitive. Therefore, we request that you include a robust investment in the Javits program in the FY 2023 Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,
