United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2010

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inouye:

As school districts around the country struggle to balance their books, it is important to provide them the support they need to keep as many effective teachers in the classroom as possible. This is particularly important in high-poverty and high-minority schools that stand to lose the most teachers if layoffs occur. We must ensure that our kids are not asked to bear the burden of this economic downturn with diminished educational opportunities.

Even as we respond to the urgent needs of our schools and students, we cannot ignore our responsibility to act in a fiscally responsible way. That means not spending money we don't have. And it means coupling additional resources with additional reforms—reforms designed to benefit our students by improving the quality of their schools.

We support the effort to provide additional resources to keep teachers in the classroom. However, we are concerned about Congressman Obey's proposal to use $800 million budgeted for three critical reform efforts – Race to the Top, the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), and the Charter Schools Program – to pay for the Education Jobs Fund. Although we commend the effort to provide funding for cash-strapped school districts so they may save educator jobs, this should not be done at the expense of these vital programs, which are driving state- and local-level improvements for students across the country.

By taking money from these programs in the midst of the competitive process, we would not only derail bold education reform efforts, we'd also be breaking faith with the states, districts and schools that relied on the existence of this funding as an incentive to undertake reform. In numerous states, Race to the Top has given education stakeholders the leverage they need to reform systems and policies that for too long failed too many students. By reducing funding in this manner Congress would withdraw a substantial amount of promised funds, pulling the rug out from under the efforts of thousands of communities around the country working together to improve their schools.

Moreover, there is no precedent for mid-year rescissions of such amounts in individual education programs. Thirty-six states submitted applications for Phase Two of Race to the Top, and 93 organizations in 32 states have initiated a TIF application this year. We should not cut these efforts short before they have had the opportunity to work.

In short, the proposed Department of Education cuts are unacceptable. Using these programs as offsets for teacher jobs presents us with a false choice between supporting teachers or supporting these critical reform efforts. We are committed to working with you to find other offsets to ensure that we can support our teachers and continue funding these innovative efforts.

Sincerely,

Senator Evan Bayh

Senator Richard Durbin

Senator Michael F. Bennet

Senator Ron Wyden

Senator Kay Hagan

Senator Mark Begich

Senator Mary Landrieu

Senator Joe Lieberman

Senator Tom Carper

Senator Mark Warner

Senator Claire McCaskill

Senator Mark Udall

Senator Dianne Feinstein

Senator Bill Nelson

Senator Roland Burris

Senator Blanche Lincoln

CC:

Vice-Chairman Thad Cochran
Chairman Tom Harkin
Ranking Member Mike Enzi