

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 11, 2014

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has informed us that the U.S. Department of Education's Office of the General Counsel recently denied their application for a one-year continuation of its Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL) Implementation award, which funds the Montana Striving Readers Program (MSRP). The Office of the General Counsel told OPI the reason for the denial was OPI's failure to apply for the full five years of funding in its original SRCL application.

The SRCL grant announcement in 2011 stated that awards would be made for programs lasting "up to 60 months." This led OPI staff to believe that it was not necessary to apply for all 60 months, and that continuation awards could be secured at a later time, provided that funding would be available. Indeed OPI ended up applying for a three-year grant with the belief that the State could extend for an additional period of time.

OPI has since requested that the Department approve a one-year continuation of its SRCL grant, and we urge you to fulfill its request. However, the Department's Office of the General Counsel has said it is concerned an extension would "alter the scope and objectives" of Montana's SRCL project and "undermined the competitive integrity of the program." We believe both these concerns are unfounded.

First, a continuation of MSRP would alter neither the scope nor the objectives of the project. OPI clearly states its objectives under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) each year, and plans to continue meeting these objectives. OPI has also assured us that it intends to continue MSRP under the program's current scope.

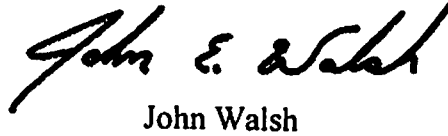
Second, a continuation of MSRP would not undermine the competitive integrity of the grant program. Rather, a one-year extension would keep Montana on par with the five other states who are currently implementing a five-year SRCL program: Georgia, Louisiana, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

The President and the Department have repeatedly affirmed their commitment to ensuring that all children have the literacy skills they need to succeed in school and beyond. We urge the Department to uphold this commitment to Montana's children by supporting our state's literacy improvement efforts.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester



John Walsh

Cc: Denise Juneau, Superintendent of the Montana Office of Public Instruction