

August 26, 2008

Honorable Margaret Spellings  
Secretary of Education  
US Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Madame Secretary,

On June 23, 2008, members of the Reading First Advisory Committee met to discuss the findings summarized in the *Reading First Impact Study: Interim Report*, a study commissioned by the Institute for Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education. At this meeting, we identified three key concerns associated with the results outlined in the interim report and committed to develop a brief response that identified the major limitations of the study and its findings. The enclosed document, *Response to the Reading First Impact Study Interim Report*, is our official response to the interim report.

In our response, we suggest that the Congress and other policy-makers should be cautious in interpreting the results from the impact study. We believe that fundamental flaws in the design and implementation of the study – including the lack of random assignment in selecting schools, contamination across conditions, assessment of limited variables, and selection of schools not representative of the schools receiving funding under Reading First – severely limit the study's utility in informing policy decisions. Therefore, other sources of information should be considered before judging the efficacy of the Reading First program.

Additionally, we outline four recommendations to Congress in our response. Specifically, we urge Congress to: 1) refrain from eliminating funding for Reading First; 2) regard the final report of the Reading First Impact Study with caution; 3) defer further action regarding the future of Reading First until data from the multiple sources available have been reviewed and analyzed; and 4) incorporate funding and authority for rigorous evaluations in future legislation, extending and improving the ground breaking plans that were part of the Reading First legislation.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the interim report. A hard copy of this cover letter and our *Response to the Reading First Impact Study Interim Report* is being sent to you today via Federal Express.

Sincerely yours,

Katherine A. Mitchell, Chair  
Reading First Advisory Committee

Cc: Dr. Joseph Conaty  
Dr. Grover Whitehurst