

April 2, 2002

Dear Chief State School Officer:

I am pleased to send you the attached application and guidance for the Reading First program. Reading First is the largest – and yet most focused – early reading initiative this country has ever undertaken. The program will provide support to State educational agencies, local educational agencies, and schools to implement proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. By applying the best and most rigorous scientifically based reading research and coordinating with other Federal, State and local initiatives aimed at improving reading instruction, this important new initiative will help to improve student achievement and ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade.

Reading First is authorized under Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. As required in the legislation, each State educational agency (SEA) must submit an application to the Department in order to receive funding. The legislation also requires that an expert panel selected by the Secretary, the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) review State plans. This requirement makes it infeasible for States to apply for Reading First through their ESEA consolidated applications.

Once the expert panel recommends funding an SEA's application, the Secretary will award funds on a formula basis. The attached table shows each State's estimated fiscal year 2002 Reading First allocation. These funds will become available on July 1, 2002 and remain available for obligation by SEAs and local educational agencies (LEAs) through September 30, 2004.

Through Reading First, SEAs will make competitive subgrants to eligible local educational agencies to support the implementation of K-3 reading programs based on scientific reading research. SEAs will develop selection criteria that distinguish among

applicants based on the need to improve reading achievement and the research-base and quality of the programs they propose to implement.

SEA applications will be held to rigorous standards for approval. State plans must satisfactorily address all program requirements before the Department will award funds to States. We urge you to submit your application as soon as possible to maximize the amount of time your agency and local districts will have to obligate the funds. Your State must submit its application no later than July 1, 2003. The application may be submitted electronically. Electronic copies of the application materials are available on the Reading First web site at: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst>. [link updated 7/04]

The enclosed non-regulatory program guidance will assist your agency, as well as districts and schools in your State, in the successful implementation of this landmark initiative. To further assist you in preparing your Reading First application, the Department is in the final stages of contracting with an entity that will coordinate technical assistance. More information on the assistance available to you as you develop your Reading First application will be forwarded shortly.

If you or your staff has questions or need further information regarding Reading First, please contact the Reading First program office at Reading.First@ed.gov or (202) 401-4877. If you choose to submit your application electronically, please send it to the Reading First email address.

Reading First is the academic cornerstone of the No Child Left Behind Act, which recognizes the importance of both improving student achievement and implementing programs and strategies scientifically proven to be effective. I look forward to working with you on this exciting new effort to ensure that all children can read by the end of third grade.

Sincerely,

Susan B. Neuman, Ed.D.

Enclosures

