

April 5, 2024

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions Committee
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Comments and resources from The Wallace Foundation in response to Senate HELP Committee Ranking Member Cassidy's RFI on Improving Student Literacy

I am writing on behalf of The Wallace Foundation in response to the recent written request for information from Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D., Ranking Member of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, regarding ways to improve literacy.

The Wallace Foundation is a non-partisan, independent, and endowed charitable foundation based in New York City. Through our work, we seek to develop and share research evidence that can inform practice and policy in three areas: K-12 education leadership, afterschool and summer learning, and the non-profit arts sector. We adhere to the principle "we say more, only as we know more," limiting any recommendations we make to what the evidence supports.

As we share your commitment to ensuring practice and policy is founded on a robust evidence base, we are writing to share several studies that the Wallace Foundation has supported that have found that well-designed summer and afterschool programs can have positive impacts on young people's literacy and broader skills. These studies include:

- [*READS: Helping Children Become Summer Bookworms*](#)¹: A 2018 ESSA Tier 1 randomized control trial conducted among 6,000 second and third graders in 59 schools found that the READS program -- a structured, home-based summer reading program developed by James Kim, professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education -- led to reading gains equivalent to nearly one month of reading skills, and nearly 1.5 months for students in the highest poverty schools (Gill, 2018). READS helps children from high-poverty schools make reading gains by providing ten free books to third through fifth graders over the summer, while also encouraging family engagement, teaching students a reading routine, and providing gentle reminders throughout the summer.
- [*Every Summer Counts: A Longitudinal Analysis of Outcomes from the National Summer Learning Project*](#)²: A multi-year Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Tier III study of

¹ Jennifer Gill, The Wallace Foundation, 2018.

² Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Catherine H. Augustine, John F. Pane, Jonathan Schweig, RAND, 2020.

summer programs in five large school districts found that students who consistently attended high-quality summer programs balancing academics with enrichment for two years in a row saw meaningful improvements in language arts and other skills (McCombs et al., 2020).

- [*Investing in Successful Summer Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*](#)³: An analysis of 43 summer programs meeting ESSA Tiers I-III found that 16 reported positive impacts in reading and reading-related skills, two of which were Tier I and 14 Tier III (McCombs et al., 2019).
- [*Afterschool Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act*](#)⁴: An analysis found that 22 afterschool studies meeting ESSA Tiers I-III standards reported positive changes in reading scores, among other positive outcomes (Neild et al., 2019)

These results suggest that intentional, well-designed out-of-school time programs (meaning summer and afterschool programs) can have positive impacts on improving the literacy of young people. At the same time, there is a need for more research and program evaluations, including to better understand how different approaches work for different groups in different contexts.

We hope these observations and considerations are helpful and thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please let us know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,



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cc: Senate HELP Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders

³ Jennifer Sloan McCombs, *et al.*, RAND, 2019.

⁴ Neild, R.C., Wilson, S.J., & McClanahan, W., The Wallace Foundation, 2019.