

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

May 10, 2010

The Honorable Arne Duncan
Secretary
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan:

I write to express support for the *Virginia Initiative for Science Teaching and Achievement (VISTA)* proposal submitted to the Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Fund by a consortium of Virginia's institutions of higher education, including George Mason University, Virginia Commonwealth University, University of Virginia, The College of William and Mary, and James Madison University. VISTA's partnership also includes the Virginia Department of Education and 47 local school districts. The collaboration of these universities will bring together a uniquely qualified team of multi-disciplinary educators to provide a network of support for science teacher professional development to increase student performance in Virginia.

Preparing Virginia students to enter the 21st century STEM work force is a top priority in Virginia. The goal of VISTA is to improve science teaching and hence student learning of science throughout Virginia. I understand VISTA is designed to increase the number of teachers who are highly effective teachers, especially for teachers of high-need students, by identifying, recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining highly effective teachers.

This is a very ambitious initiative that could make a substantial difference in the way that science is taught in Virginia schools. I understand the grant, through its work with teachers, principals, school district science coordinators, and university science education faculty, will add to the infrastructure that would result in achievement gains in science for Virginia students. This proposed program is based on strong empirical evidence of improvement in science instruction and student performance on support programs piloted in three large Virginia school districts. VISTA will extend these programs and the on-going research to other school districts in Virginia.

Thank you for your consideration of this application. If my office can provide you with any further information, please don't hesitate to contact Kelly Thomasson at 202-224-2023 or kelly_thomasson@warner.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator