

July 15, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cassidy and Ranking Member Sanders,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to urge you to **ensure access to high-quality, protected federal data sources and systems by sustaining data collection efforts, contracts, interagency agreements, privacy protections, and adequate staffing to oversee efforts that strengthen the education and workforce data ecosystem.** Specifically, we urge you to maintain funding and adequate staffing for those data efforts overseen by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), as they provide the evidence base for effective policy and fiscal decision-making, and their continued operation depends on Congressional investment and oversight. Federal-level education data and the research it enables are critical to states' ability to understand the broader education and workforce landscape, how they compare to other states on resources and outcomes, and what's working in other states. **As the U.S. Department of Education (ED) aims to increase state autonomy over educational systems, federal data and research will become increasingly vital to enabling states to make informed, efficient, and effective decisions about policy and resource allocation.** Without this information and with more limited support for providers overall, states are left on their own to navigate solutions to student, family, and worker needs, without crucial context from comparable data in other states or evidence of what works.

IES uses federal data to project future enrollment, graduation rates, teacher supply and demand, and expenditures in schools and institutions. Its work is critical in identifying the future direction of the country's education and workforce development and in preparing the U.S. education system for global competition, crises such as pandemics, and technological change. Moreover, IES makes information publicly available to assist students and parents in making informed education and career choices and navigating the support necessary for their success.¹

IES also conducts evaluations of federal programs, including policies under consideration or recently implemented, such as career and technical education concentrations under Perkins V, FAFSA simplification, special education spending, and efforts to leverage educational technology to address unfinished learning in math. These evaluations are critical in addressing ongoing educational challenges, such as learning loss and gaps, teacher shortages, support for students with disabilities, and college access and success. This data-driven evaluation is essential for holding the federal government accountable to taxpayers by enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of education policies.²

The data systems that IES maintains are also an indispensable tool for individuals, institutions, and state leaders to make informed decisions about education and workforce priorities within communities. The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) resource, "[Legislators Need Meaningful Access to Data](#)," highlights how state

¹ *Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Evaluation and Evidence-Building Plan for the U.S. Department of Education*, available at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/2025/02/edfy23annualevaluationplanfinal#:~:text=March%202022&text=IES%20is%20the%20independent%2C%20non,Washington%2C%20DC:%20Author>

² *Id.*

legislators can use data to answer questions and take action to improve their state's education system and support their state's economic future. Federal data plays a key role in state decision making; for instance, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores and Common Core of Data (CCD) fiscal files collectively reveal comparative outcomes and resource allocation between states and provide insights on cost-effective choices that advance academic learning. Further, through existing state and federal data systems, states are working to provide individuals and members of the public with the insights they need to make informed decisions about their education and career pathways. This kind of data transparency can only be achieved through robust data systems. States need federal support and data access to maintain their data systems so that they are oriented toward access and support responsive policymaking.

The recent terminations and reductions of data collection-related contracts, interagency agreements, and staff layoffs at ED, particularly those that oversee education and workforce development grant programs and provide technical assistance and support to state data leaders, imperil the ability of states to leverage data to advance students' academic achievement and economic mobility. For instance, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that has been impacted by recent contract terminations. While IPEDS can currently collect data, contracts that support the analytical and quality control aspects of the data collection have not yet been renewed and are anticipated to be renewed at a severely reduced level. In addition, the reduction in force of core IT support for the collection of this data has dramatically impacted the ability of institutions to submit this data promptly, and these disruptions threaten the underlying data quality of the dataset. This further undermines the Department's ability to provide parents and students with accurate information about postsecondary pathways, as the IPEDS underpin the U.S. Department of Education's signature parent and student information product on postsecondary outcomes — the College Scorecard. With the current resource allocation, we anticipate reductions to or elimination of technical assistance and support, resulting in severe impacts to the quality and usability of IPEDS data going forward. Similarly, contract terminations have negatively impacted DataLab, which offers public access to education data nationwide, as the terminations limit the website's public accessibility and overall effectiveness. Low-quality or inaccessible data is equivalent to having no data at all. Enabling states to use federal data requires adequate staffing and resources for all of these crucial steps. The datasets maintained at ED undergird distribution mechanisms for Title IA and other grants and without high quality data, funding may not be disbursed to school districts as intended or in a timely manner, a concern we are already hearing from local leaders.

State and local governments, advocates, researchers, and community-based organizations need federal partnership to effectively collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to inform decision-making and drive positive impacts for individuals and communities. State and local data leaders rely on federal data to enable state education and data systems—from early childhood through K–12, postsecondary, and workforce—to be more effective, accountable, and efficient by enabling leaders to:

- **Connect employers with local students participating in career and technical education programs of interest to the employer.** For instance, Indiana's Department of Workforce Development uses its State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), developed and maintained with federal support and technical assistance, to power tools like Pivot, a workforce recommendation engine. Pivot integrates education, workforce, and unemployment data to help students and job seekers identify career paths that align with their unique skills and experiences. Federal investment in SLDS infrastructure enables states to build innovative tools that connect education and labor market data. In addition, the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI), administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, serves as a vital complement to SLDS by supporting state efforts to build longitudinal data systems that

integrate education and workforce information. Together, these programs help states develop comprehensive, cross-sector data systems to inform policy and support students, workers, and employers.

- **Support states adopting tools, strategies, and pedagogy to support the Science of Reading.** Mississippi leveraged investments in education research and development (R&D) to revamp its approach to literacy instruction. This included implementing the Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling program, which trains teachers in the science of reading. The state used data, including federal data like the Nation's Report Card (NAEP), to track its progress in literacy education. This allowed them to measure the impact of their initiatives and demonstrate improvement. After implementing their evidence-based approach for eight years, Mississippi saw a significant improvement in fourth-grade reading scores on the NAEP, moving up 28 places to rank 21st nationally. They continue to use NAEP and NCES to support this work.
- **Create rich geographic and demographic insights to support targeted education policy and investment.** With access to NCES geolocation and urbanicity data, IPEDS, the Condition of Education, and Census Bureau TIGER/Line files, the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC) at the University of Illinois creates accurate maps and demographic profiles of school districts, neighborhoods, and higher education institutions. These data tools allow IWERC to analyze the geographic and socioeconomic context in which students learn—helping state and local leaders identify gaps in access, target underserved communities, and design policies that respond to local needs. This level of precision is essential for making data-informed decisions about school funding, program implementation, and workforce development strategies—especially in resource-constrained regions.
- **Identify the extent to which the needs of students with disabilities are being consistently met.** Local and state advocates rely on data on student access to general education classrooms that is required by IDEA section 618 to hold LEAs accountable for appropriately serving children. For example, special education advocates have used data collected in line with federal requirements to analyze the level of inclusion for students with particular disabilities and identified troubling inconsistencies that have prompted districts to review their criteria for determining the least restrictive environment.
- **Access and implement research and evidence-based interventions to support student achievement.** The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) is an online library of education research, reviewed and sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). The vast majority of districts - even large urban districts - do not have the funding to obtain their own research library subscriptions. Instead, they rely on ERIC to access high-quality research and evidence that supports their implementation of effective interventions and programs.

Federal data isn't just a resource for state and local leaders—it also empowers families and communities to make informed decisions about their daily lives.

- **Help families make informed decisions about schools when relocating.** When families move to a new city, they often rely on school quality indicators to guide housing and enrollment choices. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), maintained by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, plays a critical role in this process. Through partnerships with platforms like GreatSchools.org, which incorporates CRDC data on disability resources and school climate, parents can access tools embedded in widely used sites like Zillow to compare schools based on inclusion metrics and other equity indicators. This empowers families, particularly those with children who have disabilities, to identify schools that best meet their needs and make better-informed housing decisions.

State and local leaders need access to federal data that supports their efforts to support students, investigate new policy questions, and direct the future of state and local education and workforce investments effectively. As the examples above demonstrate, federal data drive stronger education and workforce systems at the state and local level. Ongoing collaboration and support from federal partners are critical to ensuring that state and local leaders can use federal data in ways that most benefit students, workers, families, employers, and communities. Congressional action to maintain and strengthen these systems is vital to ensuring state and local leaders have the tools and evidence they need to make informed, data-driven, fiscally responsible decisions.

We would be pleased to discuss this further with you or your staff at your convenience. Robin Steans, President, Advance Illinois, rsteans@advanceillinois.org, would happily facilitate a conversation.

Sincerely,

Advance Illinois
Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools (AIRSS)
Chicago Urban League
Decoding Dyslexia Massachusetts
Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research
EdAllies
Education Law Center-PA
Education Trust-Midwest
Every Texan
Illinois Action for Children
Illinois Collaboration on Youth
Illinois Education Association
Illinois Network of Charter Schools
Kids First Chicago
Large Unit District Association: LUDA
Latino Policy Forum
Legal Council for Health Justice
Noble Schools
Partnership for College Completion
Partnership for Resilience
Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence
Stand for Children Illinois
Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT)
The Chicago Public Education Fund
We, the Village Coalition
West 40 Intermediate Service Center #2
AACTE: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
Accelerate
Advance CTE
All4Ed
Alliance for Learning Innovation
American Atheists
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
American Institutes for Research

American Psychological Association Services
American Statistical Association
APIA Scholars
Applied Learning Insights LLC
Association for Career and Technical Education
BES (Building Excellent Schools)
CAST
Children and Screens: Institute of Digital Media and Child Development
Collaborative for Student Success
Colorado Succeeds
Common Cents Education Consulting
Competency-Based Education Network
Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Research
Council of Academic Deans from Research Education Institutions
Data Quality Campaign
Data Science 4 Everyone
Digital Promise Global
EDGE Consulting Partners
EdTrust
Education Law Center
Education Reform Now
Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University
Educators for Excellence
EduDream
Empower Schools
Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce
Hillcrest Advisory
InnovateEDU
Institute for Advancing Computing Education
Instructional Research Group
Knowledge Alliance
Learning Forge
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council on Teacher Quality
National Education Association
National Rural Education Association (NREA)
New America's Education Policy Program
Next Generation Learning Challenges
P20 Strategies LLC
Project Evident
Public Advocates Inc.
SETDA
Software & Information Industry Association
Start Early
The Attainment Network
The Brinson Foundation
The Center for Black Educator Development

The Center for Learner Equity
The Study Group
Thomas B. Fordham Institute
Women Employed