



Fiscal Stimulus Plan: Provide Strategic Investment in Realizing the Potential of Longitudinal Data Systems to Improve Student Achievement

Proposal

The proposed Fiscal Stimulus Plan provides a strategic and timely opportunity to infuse resources into state and local efforts to build longitudinal student data systems capable of providing educators and policy makers with accurate information that can be used to improve student achievement and outcomes. The Data Quality Campaign proposes allocating \$700 million of the Stimulus Plan over the next two years for education data investments. The funds would provide support to state and local education systems to build not only the necessary technical infrastructure, but the staffing, training, and capacity throughout the system to be able to use the information produced by these data systems to inform decision making from the classroom to the Capitol.

Benefits of Funding Longitudinal Data Systems as Part of the Fiscal Stimulus Package:

- ***Transform education into an information-driven sector.*** There is a unique window of opportunity to change the culture around using data to improve instruction and learning that may be closing due to the budget crisis.
- ***Create new jobs by developing a cadre of state and local data use professionals.*** State and Local Education Agencies need to expand the number and type of staff to ensure data is linked and used throughout the agency and across all agencies (postsecondary, labor, social services, health, juvenile justice) in ways that ensure all appropriate information is available to improve student outcomes.
- ***Ensure that past federal, state, and private infrastructure investments are leveraged for maximum benefit.*** To date, millions of dollars have been spent to develop technical data infrastructures, but we have only begun to have access to and use the new rich information coming out of these systems. Without further support, these systems' benefits for analyzing and using data will never be realized.
- ***Strengthen accountability for current and future education funding.*** The U.S. spends hundreds of billions of dollars annually in the education sector. Currently, we do not have adequate data available to account for the effectiveness of the funds or how efficiently the funds are allocated within and across states and districts for the maximum achievement of our youth.

To ensure data is transformed into information that can be used to improve student achievement and system performance, we need to focus as much on the "people side" of the issue as the technology. This stimulus package has the potential to change how we make decisions in education and especially how we tailor the learning process for every child to bolster the likelihood of academic success.

States are Ready to Act Now with Stimulus Funds

Every state has applied for federal financial assistance to build their data systems through the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grants Program since 2005.

- Only 27 states have benefited from this federal support and many states have applied more than once to tap into this highly valued support.
- These grants have provided the start-up capital to build statewide longitudinal data systems or venture capital to further expand existing systems, but this money has not been enough for any state to build a robust information system or the capacity to use the information produced by these systems.
- Thirty eight states submitted grant applications for the most recent round of IES funding. These states have current strategic plans for how they would use federal money to support the growth and use of their data system.

States are well prepared to use federal money that would be available through the fiscal stimulus plan and to use funds effectively and efficiently. They have already been mapping out and planning how they would use these federal funds to prepare their systems with IES grant help. State strategic planning and readiness is also evidenced by the findings of the Data Quality Campaign's recent annual survey. The survey showed that 47 states plan to have eight or more of the 10 elements in place within three years, but certain critical elements of a statewide longitudinal system may be left out if aid is not available.

All states and districts will benefit enormously from the federal support to fully achieve the goals of their systems. Those states with most sophisticated systems need to continue to refresh and expand their data infrastructure while addressing the policy and classroom contexts that impact how this data is used. Many states can go no further in developing the infrastructure or supporting its use without federal support. No matter where they are on the development spectrum, states must be accountable for using these federal investments effectively. The DQC's Essential Elements of a Longitudinal Data System provides a foundation for an independent audit of the implementation of these federal funds. Similarly, the DQC's forthcoming set of action steps to develop state capacity to ensure the effective use of these data systems can serve as a roadmap as well as an audit tool to ensure the impact of these investments on student achievement and system performance.

Longitudinal data system elements are critical to ensuring every child leaves high school prepared for the rigors of the 21st century workplace and postsecondary education. Such information has never been available before. This stimulus package will address national challenges: it will help build momentum to support robust implementation of these systems while also providing the vital support required to effectively use them.

Expected Outcomes from this Investment

The majority of data investments to date have been used for the technology infrastructure to collect, store, and format student-level data. States, districts and the federal government will need to invest in the tools and resources that enable stakeholders to actually understand and apply the data to increase student achievement in America's schools. Creating a useable information system requires investments in teacher and principal preparation programs, school and district professional development programs, access, and training for state policymakers to use the data. Other benefits of this stimulative investment would include (not an exhaustive list):

- Linking state education data with postsecondary data as well as health, human services, and workforce information systems to better serve at-risk individuals throughout their education.
- Building information tools for states and districts to identify best practices, successful interventions, teacher effectiveness, and college readiness; and the independent audit tools to

ensure the data infrastructure, governance and implementation processes are effectively supporting school improvement efforts.

- Increasing the alignment and interoperability of data systems within and across states for research, analysis, and information sharing.
- Developing and conducting training throughout the education pipeline to ensure the data is used to increase student achievement and not just compliance.
- Continuing to develop state-level capacity to ensure the quality of the data and to support a national research database in the State Education Data Center that will work collaboratively with states, businesses, foundations, and the non-profit sector to bring the best expertise available to high quality data collection, reporting, and use.

Federal, state and local policymakers must work together to provide the necessary resources to ensure that data investments convey a coordinated strategy. Our education system is too valuable to continue to exist without the best information systems that technology and training can offer.

Conclusion

Using relevant, reliable, and consistent information to drive all decisions across the education sector—a transformation that was not even conceivable a mere three years ago—is now an attainable goal. Thanks to the hard work and leadership of states, the investments by the federal government and private foundations, and the growing national momentum behind this agenda, all of us—students, teachers, parents, administrators, and policy makers – increasingly have the information at our fingertips to ensure every child has the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. This goal and the progress in building these data systems are at risk without a strategic federal investment.

Data Quality Campaign

The Data Quality Campaign is a national, collaborative effort to encourage and support state policymakers to improve the collection, availability and use of high-quality education data and to implement state longitudinal data systems to improve student achievement. The campaign aims to provide tools and resources that will assist state development of quality longitudinal data systems, while also providing a national forum for reducing duplication of effort and promoting greater coordination and consensus among the organizations focusing on improving data quality, access and use.