

December 11, 2023

Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Chair  
Senate HELP Committee  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Bill Cassidy  
Ranking Member  
Senate HELP Committee  
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

*RE: Advancing Research in Education Act Support and Additional Feedback*

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

As a group of national membership, policy, and advocacy organizations focused on changing the role of data to ensure that it is useful for individuals navigating their pathways through education and into the workforce, we write to support the bipartisan Advancing Research in Education Act (AREA), which will reauthorize the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA). The provisions included within this bill reimagine the role of statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS) – integrated data systems that contain early childhood, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce data – as a tool for better providing better support, transparency, and quality to individuals navigating their education and workforce journeys.

We appreciate the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee’s interest in supporting and sustaining a data and research ecosystem that can help improve the education and workforce experiences of millions of children and adults across the country. ESRA plays a crucial role in that ecosystem, providing critical investments and technical assistance that enable rigorous research and the development of robust, integrated SLDSs. It has been far too long since ESRA was reauthorized. In the intervening years, education and workforce research, evidence, and data have evolved. For example, states have moved beyond the original, siloed vision of the SLDS program, developing integrated (i.e., cross-agency) data systems that extend from early childhood into the workforce. State demand for technical assistance on how to securely share student data for the learner’s benefit has also increased.

The AREA Act makes huge strides toward meeting the evolving needs and expectations states, districts, and schools have for the investment and support required to maximize valuable information resources in an appropriate and secure manner. We are particularly pleased to see that the bill includes the following critical elements:

- Expands the eligible applicant pool for SLDS grants beyond state educational agencies by including the Governor’s office, a state agency, data governance body, or other public sector organization, or a multi-state consortium.
- Moves the grant program’s focus beyond K-12 education to P-20W data and data systems, aligning more closely with the direction in which states are moving and enabling funds to support this important infrastructure build out.
- Adds a specific focus on statewide data governance structures.
- Embraces linked, open, and interoperable data standards.
- Ensures states have the flexibility to address their greatest data needs, while also signaling priorities that all states might benefit from (e.g., improving data integration, updating source systems, providing secure data access through dashboards and individualized tools, supporting staff capacity to manage, use, and protect data, and promoting cross-agency data governance).

- Focuses on the need to provide states with support and resources to address privacy requirements and implement privacy protections while ensuring data can be used to strengthen education and workforce systems.
- Acknowledges the need for guidance from the Department and partner agencies regarding data sharing and use in accordance with federal privacy and other laws (e.g., unemployment compensation statutes and regulations).
- Provides authority for data innovation grants to allow the Secretary of Education to provide states support on emerging, unanticipated data needs of the future.
- Aligns the definition of “evidence-based” with “scientifically valid research” except for purposes of technical assistance where it will align with the definition of the underlying program.

Thank you for your commitment and hard work in crafting a thoughtful approach to the reauthorization of ESRA. We are particularly appreciative of your robust focus on state data infrastructure, use, and privacy. And, we stand ready to assist in any way that we are able to move this bill forward. Should you have questions, please contact Data Quality Campaign’s Vice President, Federal Policy Kate Tromble at [kate@dataqualitycampaign.org](mailto:kate@dataqualitycampaign.org).

Sincerely,

All4Ed  
Advance CTE  
America Forward, the nonpartisan policy initiative of New Profit  
Credential Engine  
Data Foundation  
Data Quality Campaign  
ExcelinEd in Action  
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)  
Jobs for the Future  
Knowledge Alliance  
National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)  
National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB)  
National Urban League  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
Results for America  
StriveTogether  
Third Way  
UnidosUS