

Summary of the SLDS Provisions in the Advancing Research in Education Act (AREA)

The AREA Act expands the focus of the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) grant program—moving beyond K–12 data to P–20W data and data systems. It supports states in this process by including more expansive language and clarity around the use of SLDS grants and requiring assistance with privacy, security, and data integration. Through the AREA Act, the SLDS grant program’s applicant pool expands to include governor’s offices, state agencies, data governance bodies, and other public sector organizations or multi-state consortiums. The AREA act promotes alignment with other federal legislation requiring data, such as the Higher Education Act (HEA), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and the Head Start Act, to increase standardization and ease the reporting burden of SLDSs. The bill outlines specific guidance and technical assistance that the Secretary of Education and others must provide to states. Additionally, by authorizing Data Innovation Grants, the AREA Act encourages SLDS leaders to continue innovating and allows the Secretary of Education to provide states with support on emerging, unanticipated data needs for the future.

Definitions

The AREA Act defines the following terms:

- **Eligible agency:** (i) A state educational agency; (ii) the office of the governor; (iii) a state agency, data governance body, or public sector organization designated by the governor; (iv) an outlying area; or (v) a consortium of previous listed entities. *While previously limited solely to state education agencies (SEAs), this updated definition enables data systems that are housed outside of an SEA to receive funding through the SLDS grant program. This change better aligns the program with states’ current efforts, which are to modernize systems to connect data from early childhood through the workforce (P–20W).*
- **State:** Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the freely associated states, and the outlying areas.
- **Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS):** A data system operated at the state level by an eligible agency that connects individual-level data from early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, postsecondary education, adult education, workforce development, labor market outcomes, and other data sources. The agency must also ensure data security and transparency, as well as enhance the ability of stakeholders to use data to inform decisionmaking and improve education and workforce opportunities and outcomes. *This updated definition of an SLDS reflects that state data systems are more often currently recognized as systems that link data across the full P–20W continuum. Previously, they were defined as systems that link elementary and secondary data.*
- **Technical assistance:** Assistance in evidence use, analyzing and using data, implementing and evaluating programs, and identifying and applying for research funding opportunities provided by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to improve educational outcomes. *This updated definition broadens technical assistance to include evidence use and programmatic evaluation, which better aligns with current state needs to understand the data and evidence base that drives their decisionmaking. The updated definition also explicitly includes assistance with identifying and applying for funding opportunities which could enable greater access to federal grant programs.*

SLDS Provisions in the AREA Act

Sections 148 and 149 of the AREA act define the Grant Program for Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems and Data Innovation Grants, respectively, and set their application processes and implementation requirements. Section 148 also outlines expectations for how the Secretary of Education will report on progress made through the SLDS grant program and the types of guidance and technical assistance that the secretary and other officials must issue to states and eligible agencies.

Section 148: Grant Program for Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems

The Secretary of Education awards grants to eligible agencies to design, develop, implement, and improve SLDSs. Funds must be used “to enhance or modernize data infrastructure and analytics capacity to integrate data across early childhood education through postsecondary study and labor market outcomes into the statewide longitudinal data system.”¹

Allowable Uses of Funds. Eligible agencies that receive grants can use funds for one or more of the following activities:

- To integrate data sources in the SLDS and facilitate interoperability between them;
- To develop tools that expand public access to data insights;
- To protect and promote student privacy and data security;
- To increase stakeholders’ capacity to use and analyze data from the SLDS; or
- To provide subgrants to participating agencies or institutions to improve their ability to participate in the SLDS.

Grantees may also receive planning grants to prepare for implementing any of these activities. Planning grants are for 18 months, cannot exceed 10% of the overall budget, and grantees must reasonably engage members of the public, policymakers, community organizations, and state agencies in the planning process.

Application Process. To receive an SLDS grant, eligible agencies must submit an application to the Secretary of Education and include descriptions on how the agency will:

- Design, implement, or improve an SLDS that integrates data from early childhood through the workforce;
- Integrate data in accordance with privacy laws and ensure privacy throughout the process of collecting, storing, sharing, and destroying said data;
- Ensure technical validity, accessibility, and use by stakeholders;
- Promote standardized data definitions;
- Implement and maintain its data governance structure; and
- Ensure the SLDS’s longterm sustainability, including funding sources.

Applications are subject to peer review and those that receive and implement a planning grant, propose to provide access to data insights from the SLDS, and require the use of voluntary standards and guidelines are prioritized.

Grant Awards. Grants are awarded for up to four years with the possibility of a two-year renewal. Funding may supplement but cannot supplant additional state funding for the SLDS.

¹ Advancing Research in Education Act, S. 3392, 118th Cong. (2024).
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/3392>

Reporting Requirements. Both one year and three years after the enactment of the AREA act, the Secretary of Education must report to Congress on state practices regarding the development and use of SLDSs, their ability to manage and link individual level data securely, and best practices.

Guidance and Technical Assistance. The Secretary of Education, Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Statistics Commissioner must issue guidance and provide technical assistance, including guidance and technical assistance about:

- Ensuring privacy and security in accordance with privacy laws;
- Developing and increasing public access to tools that enable data insights;
- Supporting data linkages;
- Integrating data voluntarily reported under the Head Start Act and other early childhood data; and
- Collecting and reporting data related to enrollment and outcomes in early college high school or dual enrollment programs.

Section 149: Data Innovation Grants

The IES Director may award grants to public agencies for up to four years to increase their capacity to manage, analyze, and use data to inform decisionmaking about educational opportunities and outcomes.

Grantees are allowed to use funding to improve data quality, increase capacity (i.e. infrastructure, staffing, analytics, reporting, data sharing), develop tools, enhance privacy and security, and develop and evaluate the validity of alternative student poverty measures. To apply, public agencies must submit a plan detailing the intended uses of the grant, specific data challenges the award will help to address, and the privacy and security measures they will have in place.

Additional Resources

- [S.3392 Advancing Research in Education Act - Bill Text](#)
- [Senate HELP Committee Section-by-Section Summary](#)