

The President's First Budget Request for Education and Workforce Data Should Support Data to Help Individuals Chart Their Education and Career Pathways



For 20 years, states have been the leading actors on using data and evidence to understand and respond to issues surrounding education and the workforce. States initially built data systems to better ensure that students were making academic progress in school. But they quickly learned those systems could also help them ensure that their educational programs prepared students for college and ultimately the workforce. They also learned that those systems could help them develop alternative pathways into work, such as high-quality career and technical education, apprenticeships, and earn while you learn programs. More recently, states have been leading the way in using their data and data systems to respond to chronic absenteeism and to make sure students get back on track—reading and doing math on grade level.

To accomplish all of this, states have relied, in part, on partnership with the federal government for funding and support. The Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant program and its Department of Labor companion program, the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI), have been particularly critical. They've enabled leaders to turn their data systems into indispensable tools for making informed decisions about state priorities related to, among other things, labor market needs, credential value, skills development, and student learning outcomes.

SLDS and WDQI grants—alongside related agency technical assistance and guidance—have played a pivotal role in states' efforts to improve data collection, use, access, and security for almost a decade. These grants:

- Have enabled the development of longitudinal data systems that have the potential to provide timely, actionable data to students, families, school leaders, employers, and other key stakeholders—all while safeguarding privacy;

- Can support program evaluations and long-term studies, allowing state leaders to identify and act on what works; and
- Enhance transparency and interoperability, making vital information accessible to the public, helping individuals identify education and career opportunities, and laying the groundwork for thoughtful uses of artificial intelligence.

With continued federal investment and support, states can continue and enhance actions they've already begun. States have used federal SLDS and WDQI grant funding to accomplish the following:

- **Alabama** recently implemented cross-agency data governance legislation aimed at enhancing and tracking workforce training and outcomes in the state. Through these efforts, combined with federal SLDS and state grant funding, Alabama is building a Credential Registry that will enable education and training providers to register the credentials they issue, including certificates, licenses, degrees, and noncredit credentials, for job seekers and employers to access.
- **Indiana's [Management Performance Hub \(MPH\)](#)** houses the integrated Education and Workforce Development database, which brings together data from 12 state agencies—including the Commission for Higher Education, Department of Education, Department of Health, Department of Corrections, Department of Workforce Development, and Family and Social Services Administration. Begun and sustained in part using SLDS and WDQI grant funding, the MPH seeks to answer questions about aligning education programs with labor market needs across the state. The MPH also enables the state to address pressing program and policy issues related to [opioids](#), [fiscal transparency](#), and [other areas](#).

- **Ohio's** Governor DeWine established InnovateOhio to create a cross-agency data platform that allows for data sharing among state agencies. Part of the initiative includes DataOhio, which is a public-facing platform that provides access to data from education, workforce, health, human services, and other sectors, allowing individuals to make more informed decisions. One related tool is Ohio Career Navigator, which provides students and job seekers with personalized resources tailored to their career goals.
- **North Dakota** and **Montana** both passed legislation mandating cross-agency data governing boards for their SLDSs. Grant funding has assisted in establishing governance structures that validate data quality, security, and privacy.
- **West Virginia's** P-20 data system was created using federal SLDS grant funding. Its most recent iteration combines data from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, West Virginia Department of Education, Workforce West Virginia, and the West Virginia Community and Technical College System to provide employers and the public with insights into the labor market needs and workforce outcomes of West Virginians. The system maintains tools that provide information on the workforce outcomes of graduates from each of the state's public colleges and universities as well as data on the aspirations of graduating high school seniors and postsecondary success rates.

In addition to these current efforts, maintaining funding and support for the SLDS and WDQI grants will enable states to undertake efforts such as identifying

unemployed or underemployed workers and supporting their enrollment in postsecondary education or training for reskilling or upskilling. States will also be able to provide a clearer picture of the value of postsecondary pathways, allowing students and job seekers to make informed decisions while helping policymakers identify successful strategies for aligning state investments with programs that meet labor market skill needs. This federal support could come with requirements for states to develop and implement best practices related to data governance, privacy, and security.

To ensure that data remains a key component of decisionmaking and action going forward, states need continued federal support. The Trump administration should include requests to maintain or increase funding for the SLDS and WDQI grant programs as well as related technical assistance and support in the president's first budget request. Specifically, the next administration should:

- Sustainably fund the SLDS and WDQI grant programs at current levels or increase funding to \$100 million for SLDS and \$40 million for WDQI; and
- Work with Congress to (re)authorize and expand the SLDS and WDQI grant programs based on the bipartisan efforts begun in the 118th Congress.¹

Data Quality Campaign staff welcome the opportunity to further discuss these recommendations. We are confident that the Trump administration will take the necessary steps to ensure that states, local governments, and communities have the information they need to help their residents chart their paths to success.

¹ Details for both recommendations are in the Appendix.

APPENDIX

Recommendation #1: Sustainably fund the SLDS and WDQI grant programs

President Trump’s budget should at a minimum continue existing funding levels for the SLDS and WDQI grant programs for fiscal year 2026 accompanied by appropriate staffing capacity so that both programs can effectively operate and disburse funds to grantees. To fully support state efforts already in motion, the president’s budget could request an increase for SLDS to \$100 million and for WDQI to \$40 million with the following rationale:

State data systems need to evolve in ways that are magnitudes greater than the existing funding levels provided by the SLDS and WDQI grant programs can support. For SLDS and WDQI funds to continue to play an essential role in assisting states with the design, development, implementation, and use of longitudinal data systems, the programs must grow. The proposed increase would support states’ ongoing transition

toward efficient and effective integrated data systems from early education to workforce that are designed to provide more useful and accessible information for decisionmakers at all levels, including students, families, school leaders, policymakers, and employers.

Sustainably funding the SLDS and WDQI grant programs would bring the following benefits:

- **Builds Capacity.** Provides states, in conjunction with their own investments, the resources to improve cross-agency SLDS/P–20W data systems.
- **Increases Transparency.** Enables more accessible and reliable data for decisionmaking by policymakers as well as the public, individual students, and workers.
- **Promotes Equity.** Helps identify and address opportunity gaps in education and workforce pathways.

Recommendation #2: Work with Congress to (re)authorize and expand the SLDS and WDQI grant programs

The 118th Congress saw significant bipartisan progress on reenvisioning how the two core education and workforce data grant programs operate together. The Senate HELP Committee reported out a bipartisan reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) with interest from the House Education and the Workforce Committee on replicating the SLDS provisions. The House reported a bipartisan Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) bill out of committee, and the WDQI and other data provisions from that bill were then adopted in the Senate discussion draft. In other words, the necessary groundwork to revamp, revise, and expand these two grant programs has been done.

The Trump administration should work quickly with the 119th Congress to reintroduce the bipartisan data provisions from the Senate Advancing Research in Education (AREA) Act—ESRA reauthorization—and the House Stronger Workforce for America Act. Further, the new administration should include in its first budget request a proposal to work with the 119th Congress to pick up where previous efforts left off and see these revisions become law. The data-related provisions contained in both of these bills were crafted in a bipartisan manner and would go a long way toward improving the

education and workforce data ecosystem at the state and local levels.

The AREA Act expands the focus of the SLDS grant program, moving beyond K–12 data to P–20W data and data systems. It attempts to streamline the data systems used to comply with various federal education and workforce legislation (e.g., Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Higher Education Act, WIOA, Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, and Head Start Act) and expands the SLDS grant program’s applicant pool beyond the state education agency to include governor’s offices, state agencies, data governance bodies, and other public–sector organizations or multistate consortia. This change would allow for the following improvements:

- Better alignment between federal law and how states are currently structuring governance of their data systems;
- Broadening of the program’s allowable uses of funds to focus on using P–20W data to understand and support students’ academic achievement and college access, persistence, and completion as well as employment outcomes; and

- Specific allowances for funds to be used to improve infrastructure as well as to modernize data privacy and security policies and practices.

The Stronger Workforce for America Act authorizes the WDQI grant program, ensuring that it continues to be a feasible and sustainable source of funding for improving workforce data source systems into the future. The bill also expands access to the National Directory of New Hires, acknowledging the role SLDSs play in connecting employment outcomes to education and training programs in a secure manner. Finally, the bill encourages the use of more timely labor market information data across the workforce spectrum.

(Re)authorizing and reforming the SLDS and WDQI grant programs would bring the following benefits:

- **Encourages Bipartisanship.** Because both efforts to authorize, reform, and revise the education and workforce data grant initiatives have bipartisan support as well as broad support in the field, working to ensure that they become law would be a relatively easy way to engage in a bipartisan effort early in the administration.
- **Modernizes Federal Data Grant Programs.** Reauthorizing and reforming the programs will ensure that they are meeting the current data needs of state and local governments and that they continue to operate in an aligned fashion at the federal level. This work also can ensure that federal funds are used in the most effective and efficient manner.
- **Incentivizes Innovation.** Reforming the SLDS grant program will support data improvements and innovation.
- **Improves Data Governance, Privacy, and Security.** By focusing on P–20W data systems, the federal government has the opportunity to ensure that grant recipients are following data best practices such as having an identified cross-agency data governance structure that includes leadership-level participation, clear data privacy and security policies, and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

Resources:

- [Better P–20W Data Will Require More Advanced Workforce Data Systems](#)
- [DQC FERPA Recommendations](#)
- [DQC Recommendations on ESRA Reauthorization](#)
- [Federal Leaders Can Clear the Way for State Access to Federal Student Aid Data](#)
- [Federal Laws Are Not a Barrier to Connecting Data within a Statewide Longitudinal Data System](#)
- [The Federal Role in Safeguarding Student Data](#)
- [“Grace’s Path to Success”](#)
- [Investing in California’s Data Future: How California’s P–20W Cradle-to-Career Data System Could Take the State from Last to First](#)
- [Roadmap for Cross-Agency Data Governance](#)
- [Show Me the Data](#)
- [States Need Clarity, Resources to Scale Access and Maximize Investments in Data](#)
- [Use Case: Provide Researchers Access to Data](#)
- [What Now? A Vision to Transform State Data Systems to Inform People’s Pathways through Education and the Workforce](#)
- [Workforce Data Reforms Coalition Priorities](#)

ABOUT THE DATA QUALITY CAMPAIGN

The Data Quality Campaign is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization leading the effort to ensure that data works for everyone navigating their education and workforce journeys. For more information, go to dataqualitycampaign.org.