

KNOWLEDGE ALLIANCE BIDEN TRANSITION TEAM MEMO

This memorandum provides background and recommendations for the incoming Biden Administration from Knowledge Alliance on critical education research, technical assistance, evaluation and innovation needs, with a focus on mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students academically and socially. Knowledge Alliance is a non-profit, non-partisan organization focused on learning and applying what works to dramatically improve K-12 public education. We advocate for the greater use of research-based knowledge in education policy and practice at the federal, state, and local levels. Knowledge Alliance is comprised of leading education organizations that are dedicated to solving some of the biggest problems facing our schools today through the development and use of high-quality, relevant research.

Knowledge Alliance's members have made invaluable contributions to the educational advancements of the last half century and have helped construct the strong education research infrastructure that exists today, providing critical information to help the Federal government, State educational agencies (SEAs), and local school districts operate more efficiently, produce greater return on investment, and generate better outcomes for students and families. This critical infrastructure includes programs at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)—including the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and the Research Development and Dissemination (RD&D) program—coupled with the Comprehensive Centers (CCs) and the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program at the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Through these programs, new knowledge is created and disseminated to States, districts, and schools. (A brief description of each of these programs is included at the end of the memo.)

Based on our work across the country, we bring an important perspective on how and why we need to develop and evaluate interventions that help address the learning loss caused by COVID-19. This perspective complements the evidence-based proposals put forward by the Biden Administration, particularly those related to reopening schools and tackling equity gaps. We stand ready to partner with the new administration to implement these recommendations.

COVID-19 ACTION

Knowledge Alliance shares the incoming Biden Administration's concern about the devastating impact that COVID-19 has had on students and families, and the continued effects we anticipate in the coming year. We recognize the response to COVID-19 is an ever-evolving situation that will have long-term impacts on our education system and the nation. Recent studies have estimated that some students will experience learning loss of more than an entire school year, with children with disabilities, low-income students, students of color and English learners being hit the hardest. Our schools have never had to cope with learning loss of this magnitude, and we risk losing a generation of our students unless we conduct the research to develop the tools to respond to this crisis.

Knowledge Alliance strongly supports the two recommendations the Biden Administration has made on how to reopen schools safely and close the COVID-19 educational equity gap. Specifically, we support the creation of a White House-led initiative to identify evidence-based policy solutions for addressing learning and social and emotional well-being gaps. We also support launching a COVID-19 Educational Equity Gap Challenge Grant to encourage states to adopt evidence-based policies and practices to give students all the supports they need.

And, as the education research community continues to navigate the COVID-19 crisis, we support IES's current proposal, [Operation Reverse the Loss](#), that [envisions](#) using the existing federal R&D infrastructure to support on-the-ground efforts to address student learning loss, including the School/Learning Pulse Survey and the rapid testing of interventions. Knowledge Alliance believes that

the RELs can play an important role in testing teaching and learning interventions, evaluating them and disseminating that information broadly to education stakeholders. The CCs can play a complementary role in providing intensive technical assistance to SEAs on the policies and practices that will help address learning loss. All of this work will require additional funding to the programs highlighted as part of the education R&D infrastructure.

Knowledge Alliance also urges the Biden Administration to work with Congress to pass the Research Investment to Spark the Economy ([RISE](#)) Act as part of a COVID relief and recovery package early in 2021, which would provide an additional \$200 million for IES to fund research to address learning loss and cover unforeseen costs with respect to existing federally funded research projects. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in at least one lost year of data needed to complete research projects. This additional funding would help to mitigate the disruptions to federally supported research and core research facilities while also supporting a grant competition to conduct research on the education tools needed to respond to COVID-19's learning loss.

AGENCY REVIEW AND IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

Appoint a full slate (15 members) to National Board for Education Sciences (NBES)

The NBES presently has no members. The Board provides valuable input and oversight to the IES Director and has a statutory responsibility to approve the priorities of the Institute. The current Administration has allowed the Board to shrink its number of members down to zero, eliminating the benefit that a diversity of top education researchers can have in setting the agenda of the Institute. NBES positions do not require Senate confirmation, with members only needing to be appointed by the President. With this in mind, we urge the incoming Administration to appoint qualified individuals to NBES, with a priority for practitioners as well as education researchers with the methodological expertise to help inform federal policies and educational research priorities in an unbiased manner.

Rescind the Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping

On September 22, 2020 President Trump signed an [Executive Order](#) prohibiting Federal agencies from offering staff training that inculcates employees in race or sex stereotyping, as defined in the Order. It also instructs Federal agencies to review their grant programs and identify programs under which they might require, as a condition of receiving a grant, that grantees not promote such stereotyping or scapegoating. We ask that the Biden Administration immediately rescind this Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping.

FY2022 BUDGET

Request Significant Funding Increases for Education Research, Technical Assistance, Evaluation and Innovation

The \$200 million in supplemental funding in the RISE Act will help address the research and learning needs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic called for in the first COVID-19 recommendation. However, education research has not received adequate support in recent years while the need for research, evidence and evaluation has grown. Other research divisions in the federal government have received significant increases over the last few years, including the Education and Human Resources at the National Science Foundation (EHR-NSF) and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at National Institutes of Health (NIH). These critical programs deserve support; however, we remain concerned that crucial education research programs are being left behind. To achieve the educational impact we all aspire to, additional funds are required.

Indeed, support for the federal role in education research enjoys bipartisan support. The conservative Fordham Institute and the progressive Center for American Progress recently came together to sponsor a competition focused on education research. After the process concluded, Michael Petrilli of the Fordham Institute concluded, “Our schools need better tools. Investing in R&D may be the surest way to get them.”

We recommend that the Biden Administration make a significant investment in the current federal R&D infrastructure, which includes the Regional Educational Laboratories and the Research Development and Dissemination program at IES, as well as the Comprehensive Centers and the Education Innovation and Research programs at the U.S. Department of Education. Knowledge Alliance believes that for FY2022, the level of investment for these programs should be 10 percent greater than the recently enacted FY2021 omnibus so that we can invest in the research, technical assistance, evaluation, and innovative programs and practices needed to help the country recover from this national crisis. This additional funding would supplement the proposed Operation Learning Loss or a similar initiative by ensuring the federal R&D infrastructure disseminates and provides technical assistance on successful interventions.

Background: Existing Research, Development in Innovation Infrastructure

The combination of programs at Institute of Education Sciences—including the Regional Educational Laboratories and the Research Development and Dissemination program—coupled with the Comprehensive Centers and the Education Innovation and Research programs at the U.S. Department of Education represent most of the current Federal education research, development and innovation infrastructure. It is through these programs that new knowledge is created and disseminated to States, districts, and schools. A brief description of each of these programs follows.

Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs). The ten nationwide RELs are housed at IES and conduct and produce relevant and useable applied research and program evaluations for educators that reflect the best available research findings and offer trainings and other supports to states and districts to aid their school improvement efforts.

Research, Development and Dissemination program (RD&D): The RD&D program is also housed at IES and supports basic education research on a wide range of research projects, including projects that provide vital information on students with disabilities, teacher preparation, and strategies for improving college and workforce readiness, among other topics. This research is conducted using rigorous research methodologies, including randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental approaches.

Comprehensive Centers (CCs). The CCs provide technical assistance that builds the capacity of SEAs to help school districts and schools improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, and increase the quality of instruction. The CCs were recently recompleted and now include 19 Regional Centers that work closely with States in their regions on implementation of critical reforms in elementary and secondary education, as well as one national center providing technical assistance to the regional centers and SEAs.

Education Innovation and Research (EIR). The EIR Program, authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act, helps drive substantial and lasting improvements in student achievement by supporting the development and scale-up of successful innovations at the State and local levels. EIR uses a tiered-evidence approach that has two important design principles: it provides more funds to programs with higher levels of evidence, and it requires rigorous and independent evaluations so that programs continue to improve, and future competitions can be geared towards more promising areas of investment.