knowledge ● alliance

April 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education &
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Labor, HHS, Education &
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education &
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education &
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

Knowledge Alliance, a non-partisan non-profit, is comprised of leading education organizations committed since 1971 to the greater use of high-quality and relevant data, research, evaluation and innovation in education policy and practice at all levels. Collectively, we have long supported a set of education programs focused on building and disseminating evidence to improve teaching and learning in our Nation's classrooms.

Critical to systemic educational improvements and COVID-19 response and recovery is a strong research and technical assistance infrastructure that includes programs at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) –such as 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). It is through these programs that new knowledge is created and disseminated to states, districts, and schools. We appreciate the modest increases in funding provided in FY2021 for these critical programs to better tie evidence to practice in our schools to improve outcomes for students. However, in light of the pandemic, Congress must provide at least a ten percent increase in each of these programs for FY2022 to leverage critical research, technical assistance, evaluation and innovation to help states, districts and schools meet the academic and social emotional learning (SEL) needs of all students, especially student populations who have been historically underserved and significantly impacted by the pandemic.

With that being said, we do recognize and are incredibly grateful for the inclusion of $100 million in the American Rescue Plan Act for IES to carry out research addressing learning loss and widely disseminate those findings to state educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), educators and other stakeholders. Yet, greater investment must be provided to ensure the existing federal education research and development (R&D) infrastructure can continue to support on-the-ground efforts to address the impacts of the pandemic, while also providing SEAs and LEAs continued research and technical assistance support that will help them build their systems-level capacity to address local needs.

While additional federal resources are needed to address state and local needs for education research and technical assistance, KA priority programs have stepped up during this critical time to fill that void. For example, recently ED leadership has looked to the RELs and CCs for help in supporting states and

districts to effectively leverage research and evidenced-based strategies and interventions to address learning recovery. ED is directly engaging all RELs and CCs by requesting their input to inform the Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse. Additionally, ED has also asked the National Comprehensive Center to lead the Summer Learning and Enrichment Collaborative. The Summer Learning and Enrichment Collaborative will bring together education leaders to learn from each other and experts in the field as they develop plans for summer learning and enrichment. Collectively, these efforts are part of the first step to address accelerated learning opportunities and embark on educational recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lastly, to support continued progress on the kinds of work and investments outlined above, we urge you to provide <u>at least</u> a ten percent increase over FY2021 in FY2022 for existing federal R&D infrastructure. This kind of critical investment translates to:

- $700 million for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)
- $217.8 million for the Research Development and Dissemination (RD&D) program at IES
- $62.7 million for the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) Program
- $57.2 million for the Comprehensive Centers (CCs)
- $213.4 million for the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program

Attached below is an addendum which provides greater detail on each of the programs outlined above. Thank you for your consideration of these important recommendations. We believe that continued, strong support for and investment in the education R&D infrastructure will help improve outcomes for students and effectively leverage scarce Federal resources. Furthermore, it will empower states and local school districts to develop and implement the innovative, evidence-based approaches that work best for the students in their communities as they begin the long journey of education recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please let me know if Knowledge Alliance can be of any further assistance during the appropriations process.

Sincerely,
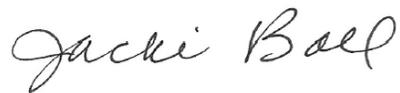
Jacki Ball

Jacki Ball
President

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FY22 Appropriations Addendum

The Institute of Education Sciences. IES is a major source of Federal funding for education research. Through its four research centers— the National Center for Education Research (NCER), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) – IES funds hundreds of grants and contracts annually that support a wide range of research projects. These centers support projects that provide vital information, often with an equity focus, on students with disabilities, teacher preparation, and strategies for improving college and workforce readiness, among other topics. In the past year, IES has successfully pivoted its efforts to consider projects in the larger context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

NCEE serves two critically important functions. First, it conducts independent evaluations of education programs supported with Federal funds. Second, NCEE houses resources for SEAs and LEAs including the RELs, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the National Library of Education.

For example:
The What Works Clearinghouse produces reviews of research on education curriculum and practice guides with evidence-based recommendations to support teaching and learning. According to the Jefferson Education Exchange, nearly a third of educators surveyed used resources from the What Works Clearinghouse. In direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the What Works Clearinghouse released a [Rapid Evidence Review of Distance Learning Programs](#) that identifies and reports on what works in distance learning educational programming from Kindergarten onwards. Additionally, The Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, housed at North Carolina State University, incorporated the recommendations of two IES practice guides, [Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#) and [Developing Effective Fractions Instruction for Kindergarten Through 8th Grade](#) in MOOC-Ed courses. These online courses provide professional development for teachers and award continuing education credentials.

Additional basic research could be done in areas of importance to educators and policymakers if more funding were available, particularly in the areas of postsecondary completion and workplace credentials. As basic research moves into the applied realm, the What Works Clearinghouse will continue to serve as a resource for educators looking for effective, research-based interventions.

Regional Educational Laboratories. The ten RELs nationwide, which operate under five-year contracts with ED, conduct applied research, develop and disseminate research-based products and provide training to states and school district staff as well as resources for educators, families and caregivers. Since the RELs have a broad set of regional stakeholders that extend beyond the SEA, they are well-attuned to a wider range of student and teacher needs. In addition to forming research partnerships focused on problems of practice in the field that provide relevant and responsive research and findings that address local needs; RELs utilize the resources of the What Works Clearinghouse, such as the practice guides, to break down the evidence into digestible chunks for educator use. They have also developed webinars and other resources based on the practice guides to aide in translating research for educators. RELs are continuously developing tools that districts and schools use to improve teaching and learning. In response to the pandemic, RELs have provided [evidence-based resources](#) to help address a host of critical challenges facing states, districts, educators, and families as they continue to navigate the impacts of COVID-19.

For example:

The REL Northeast and Islands (REL-NEI) developed a five-session coaching series, [SEL Coaching Series Guide](#), to help educators use social and emotional learning (SEL) research literature to identify evidence-based SEL interventions to implement in their districts. Additionally, REL-NEI has a [Social and Emotional Learning Research Alliance](#) with members from across the region which is providing training, coaching, technical support activities, as well as applied research to State and district leaders on SEL. One project of the Alliance, the Continuous Improvement Professional Learning Community, is helping three high school teams use continuous improvement to address SEL problems of practice which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Through the use of evidence-based practices, including continuous improvement, this project is also building capacity for the use of evidence at the school level and the use of learnings have helped to drive decision making at the district level.

As schools across the country have shifted to remote learning during the pandemic, REL Central and REL Appalachia are providing their stakeholders with research and evidence-based strategies on remote learning plans, connectivity and instructional practices. A REL Central study, [Understanding District Remote Learning Plans and Examining How They Vary by Internet Connectivity and other District Characteristics](#), will provide context about what happened across the seven state region, with a focus on rural communities when schools transitioned to remote instruction. With a focus on rural communities, findings will be important for knowing what is needed to support remote learning in the future, including addressing infrastructure, instructional needs, and student and family support, given that many districts will keep some form of remote learning as an option for students. [Initial data from the study](#) provided key insights for Wayne Stewart, superintendent for Glenwood R-8 school in rural Missouri, on the disparities of broadband Internet connectivity by district. Having specific district by district allows decisionmakers, like Dr. Stewart, to address the specific needs of their communities. Lastly, REL Appalachia developed a workshop series, [Research-Based Strategies for Effective Remote Learning](#), to disseminate best practices on remote learning which included student engagement, monitoring academic progress and providing feedback and designing instruction for a hybrid model.

Education Innovation and Research. The EIR Program, authorized by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 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.

EIR grantees are focusing on improving areas of teaching and learning, such as literacy. Much attention has recently been drawn to this area, as National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores remain flat, and journalists have highlighted that teachers are still not being prepared to teach literacy based on the science of reading. EIR projects, such as the one described below, can help make a difference in this regard.

For example:

[Future Forward](#) is a literacy intervention for students struggling with reading from kindergarten through third grade that combines intensive one-on-one tutoring during the school day with family engagement support embedded in all aspects of the program. Initially developed to serve students in Milwaukee Public Schools, the Future Forward program model was awarded an Investing in Innovation (i3) grant in 2010 by the U.S. Department of Education to further develop the program and test its impact. The external

evaluation found the program yielded positive and statistically significant impacts on reading achievement, literacy, and regular school day attendance. For example, participating students were absent from school 5.8 fewer times than control students and were 27 percent less likely to be chronically absent from school. Additionally, students participating in Future Forward were six times more likely to reach their grade-level reading benchmarks than students in the control group with the benefit of the program being most significant for students who began the program with greater literacy instruction needs. Education Analytics was awarded a $7.8 million Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant in 2017 to implement Future Forward across multiple regions in the country and evaluate its impact. The initial research evaluation of the Future Forward program model met What Works Clearinghouse standards and suggested promise for Future Forward's impact as it is currently implemented in 14 sites across three different states. An evaluation of the Future Forward program in 2018–2019 has continued to affirm the program's significant positive impact on student reading and attendance, with the greatest positive effect for students most at risk of not regularly attending school. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Future Forward effectively pivoted to a virtual format to meet student need by combining video conferencing and shared access to thousands of book titles and progress metrics.

Comprehensive Centers. The Comprehensive Centers (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 recompeted in 2020 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. The CCs operate under a Memorandum of Understanding with each SEA in the region, and the SEA sets the scope of work to be conducted through the five-year agreement.

For example:
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires SEAs to conduct periodic resource allocation reviews (RARs) in districts that serve low-performing schools. This requirement presents an opportunity for states and districts to examine the connection between resource allocation and academic outcomes. In preparing for the RAR, the Content Center focused on Building State Capacity and Productivity (BSCP) under the previous grant worked with SEA teams on how to tap readily available data—including demographic, financial, and outcomes data— so that school leaders could see how their resources compared to those of other schools in the district. SEAs were encouraged to provide the data to district leaders with instructions to share with school leaders (and school staff, if desired) in advance of the resource allocation discussion. To assist SEAs in this effort, the BSCP Comprehensive Center prepared a sample data report as an example of what can be assembled from public sources. SEA leaders can find step-by-step guidance and a RAR discussion protocol to adapt for their own use [here](#).