



July 21, 2021

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U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 4W308
Washington, DC 20202

RE: Docket ID ED-2021-OPEPD-0054

On behalf of Knowledge Alliance (KA), the following comments are provided in response to the Notice of Proposed Requirements and Definitions for Use in Discretionary Grant Programs by U.S. Department of Education (ED) Secretary Miguel Cardona published in the Federal Register on June 30, 2021. Knowledge Alliance, a non-profit, non-partisan organization, 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 promote the use of rigorous research to figure out “what works,” and why, to improve student outcomes and then share those findings with policymakers, practitioners and the general public.

Knowledge Alliance is extremely pleased that Secretary Cardona’s proposed priorities continuously recognize the importance of ensuring that the work carried out through discretionary grant programs is rooted in evidence and builds capacity with our nation’s education system. Knowledge Alliance also strongly supports the proposed definition of “evidence-based” as aligned with the meaning ascribed to it in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Overall, we are supportive of all six priorities outlined in the notice that include comprehensive and systemic approaches to addressing critical challenges facing students and educators. The following comments include a few specific points regarding three of the proposed priorities:

Proposed Priority Two: Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources, Opportunities, and Welcoming Environments.

Knowledge Alliance strongly supports ED’s interest in projects that propose innovative ways to address the various inequities in this country’s education system. Equity is critical to a flourishing education system and research is key to identifying and supporting equitable evidenced-based practices across the nation. We are particularly encouraged by the emphasis on increasing student access and success in critical and high-need fields, courses and pathways such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and Computer Science (CS) listed under (b)(1)(vi). We appreciate the holistic approach in Priority Two to address systemic practices that have contributed to inequities, so that we create a stronger and more equitable educational system.

Proposed Priority Three: Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning.

Knowledge Alliance supports Proposed Priority Three's comprehensive approach to increasing a diverse and effective educator workforce through evidence-based and capacity building approaches for educators throughout their career. Focusing on the continuum of the educator workforce from recruitment to retention is essential to strengthening the profession. We are particularly pleased that Proposed Priority Three includes a focus on instructional practices and competencies that include high-quality job-embedded professional development in addition to the development and implementation of assessments to help tailor and improve instruction and classroom practices that benefit all students. Furthermore, we appreciate the recognition of addressing the shortage of teachers and access to fully certified and effective teachers as high-need fields in both Priorities Two and Three, as well as the connection between equity and diversity that is woven throughout the priorities.

Proposed Priority Four: Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs.

Knowledge Alliance is appreciative of the diverse ways in which Proposed Priority Four focuses on projects that utilize a range of practices that support the creation of equitable and inclusive learning environments in schools such as multi-tier systems of support, educator professional development and resources to use trauma-informed practices. KA supports Proposed Priority Four's recognition of the importance of addressing and progressing past the many challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic issues through evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) practices that consider the whole child and needs of educators.

Knowledge Alliance would like to highlight the importance of more explicitly pairing SEL efforts with academic support as evidence indicates effective SEL practices can contribute to academic growth.

Proposed Definition for Evidence-Based

We would like to reiterate our strong support for the definition of "evidence-based" as aligned with the definition provided in ESEA. This definition maintains the importance of applying well-established research and standards to the education field.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed priorities and definitions. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Lindsay Fryer at lfryer@pennhillgroup.com and Soraya Zrikem at szrikem@pennhillgroup.com

Sincerely,



Jacki Ball
President
Knowledge Alliance