

September 16, 2021

Matthew Soldner
Commissioner
National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education
Sciences
400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 4160
Washington, DC 20202

RE: Docket ID ED-2021-IES-0118

On behalf of Knowledge Alliance (KA), the following comments are provided in response to the Request for Information on the U.S. Department of Education (ED) 2022-2026 Learning Agenda published in the Federal Register on August 17, 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.

Overall, Knowledge Alliance is supportive of the proposed Learning Agenda which focuses on developing an evidence-building plan around relevant and critical education topics. As a coalition of education researchers and disseminators, we have provided comments detailing the questions and activities we believe ED should prioritize within four of the six listed Learning Agenda focus areas. Additionally, we would like to note an area not listed – early childhood education – that we strongly encourage ED to consider including as a focus area.

Proposed Focus One: Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on students, schools and institutions of higher education, educators and their communities

Knowledge Alliance supports ED’s Learning Agenda focus on addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic among schools and students nationwide. KA urges ED to continue to utilize and prioritize Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and Comprehensive Centers (CCs) to support school districts and schools in addressing the impacts of COVID-19. RELs and CCs have been critical thus far in leveraging evidence-based research and interventions to quickly and constructively help schools respond to and address the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the National Comprehensive Center led the [Summer Learning and Enrichment Collaborative](#) which was created by ED to support as many students as possible through enriching and educational summer programming. The work of the Collaborative alongside the nation’s RELs and CCs helped inform ED’s [Safer Schools and Campuses Best Practices Clearinghouse](#), which includes over 200 examples of schools and communities safely returning to in-person learning. As close partners of State Educational Agencies (SEAs) and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) nationwide, KA members encourage ED to continue leaning on the education research infrastructure provided by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and other mechanisms to uncover effective and equitable responses to the questions listed below.

Some questions to consider:

1. What impact did COVID-19-related school closures and remote, in-person and hybrid learning have on student learning loss, student absenteeism and student social-emotional and mental health?
 - a. How does the impact differ by varying levels of residential, school, racial and economic segregation?
 - b. Which districts and schools were able to “beat the odds” in terms of better-than-predicted levels of performance and well-being during and after the COVID-19 pandemic? What strategies did they employ to do so?
2. What evidence-based promising practices exist for addressing learning loss and how can they be equitably implemented across different demographic school and district contexts?
3. How did States and districts leverage [\\$13.5 billion](#) in 2020 CARES Act funding to [support remote instruction](#), address student learning loss and provide support for students’ social-emotional and mental health and wellbeing?
4. How will SEAs and LEAs use COVID-19 relief money from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) for evidence-based practices to address student learning loss and provide support for students’ social-emotional and mental health and wellbeing? How can we evaluate the effectiveness of how funds were used?
5. How can ED best support the dissemination of evidence-based educational interventions to address learning loss through existing dissemination networks like RELs and CCs?
6. How can teachers be trained in assessment literacy to best utilize diagnostic and formative assessment results to understand and address students’ individual needs?

Finally, as the nation looks towards educational recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, ED should provide technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs on how to resume assessment and accountability requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) in a timeline and manner that makes sense and is safe for educators and students, given local contexts.

Proposed Focus Two: Promoting equity in student access to educational resources, opportunities, and welcoming, safe, and inclusive environments

Knowledge Alliance supports ED’s focus on promoting equity in student access to educational resources, opportunities, and welcoming, safe and inclusive environments. Knowledge Alliance member organizations have and continue to conduct research, provide technical assistance and support States and districts on a multitude of issues affecting students and educators, including effective implementation of policies and practices related to equity initiatives. **We encourage ED to build evidence in the often-overlooked areas of school finance, technology infrastructure and school integration with priority given to regions, districts and schools that are currently under-resourced.**

Some questions to consider:

1. How can ED ensure that current State math, reading and science achievement tests are equitable for all students, especially student subgroups?
2. What are best practices in equitable school finance that should be disseminated and emulated across the country?

3. How are schools equitably using technology to meet individual student needs and how is the role of the teacher changing given the prevalence of technology in classrooms?
4. What are best practices in school integration that yield promising results for student achievement, particularly for student subgroups?

ED should also provide technical assistance on information gained from researching these questions and widely disseminate such research through existing networks like RELs and CCs.

Proposed Focus Three: Meeting student social, emotional, mental health, basic, and academic needs

Knowledge Alliance strongly supports ED's focus on the social, emotional, mental, basic and academic needs of students nationwide. With evidence currently indicating that effective Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) practices can contribute to academic growth, Knowledge Alliance urges ED to prioritize relevant programs that explicitly pair SEL efforts with academic support to improve overall outcomes.

Some questions to consider:

1. What are existing programs that effectively pair SEL efforts with academic support?
2. What are important data to collect of SEL needs of students?
3. What are the pros and cons of incorporating SEL indicators into Statewide accountability systems? What data are most effective for use in such systems?
4. What effective professional development exists to train educators in meeting SEL student needs?

ED should also provide technical assistance on information gained from researching these questions and widely disseminate such research through existing networks like RELs and CCs.

Proposed Focus Five: Supporting a well-prepared diverse educator workforce and their professional growth to strengthen student learning

Knowledge Alliance supports ED's focus on supporting a well-prepared and diverse educator workforce. We believe that focusing on the continuum of the educator workforce from recruitment to retention is essential to strengthening the profession and ensuring a well-prepared workforce. We would like to highlight the need for ED to address the shortage of teachers and access to fully certified and effective teachers in high-need fields.

Some questions to consider:

1. Post pandemic, in what subjects and geographic regions are we seeing teacher shortages?
2. What are the levers and programs ED has to incentivize change in educator preparation to:
 - a. Diversify, both regionally, racially, and economically, the various educator professions;
 - b. Improve educator preparation to address challenges teachers are facing in the classroom, including in providing differentiated instruction that meets students' academic and SEL needs; and
 - c. Ensure that teachers are prepared in high-needs fields as much as possible?

3. How can the teacher profession, in preparation, induction, and professional development programs, implement and diversify pathways of advancement, including for teachers, teacher leaders, mentor teachers, instructional coaches, assistant and full-time principals, etc.?
4. What are core competencies every educator should have upon leaving a preparation program? How should schools continue professional development in these areas?
5. What are best strategies to retain highly effective teachers?

ED should also provide technical assistance on information gained from researching these questions and widely disseminate such research through existing networks like RELs and CCs.

Additional Proposed Focus: Early Childhood Education

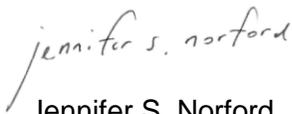
In order to move closer to a high-quality education for all, we must begin with the nation's youngest students. Knowledge Alliance strongly encourages the inclusion of early childhood education as a focus in ED's 2022-2026 Learning Agenda. Knowledge Alliance members have and continue to study the short and long-term benefits of high-quality early childhood education and encourage ED to prioritize early childhood education policies over the next four years.

Some questions to consider:

1. How does educator pay equate with a high-quality early childhood education workforce?
2. How should early childhood preparation programs be incentivized and structured to best prepare early childhood teachers?
3. What are evidence-based practices for early childhood instruction?

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Department of Education's proposed 2022-2026 Learning Agenda. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Lindsay Fryer at lfryer@pennhillgroup.com and Soraya Zrikem at szrikem@pennhillgroup.com

Sincerely,



Jennifer S. Norford
Chair
Knowledge Alliance