

February 28, 2023

Honorable Susan Bonamici
Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick

Dear Representative Bonamici and Representative Fitzpatrick,

Knowledge Alliance ([KA](#)), a non-partisan, non-profit organization, is composed 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 spent the last 50 years supporting a set of education programs focused on building and disseminating evidence to improve teaching and learning in our nation's classrooms.

KA proudly endorsed H.R. 8548, the New Essential Education Discoveries (NEED) Act, which you introduced in the last Congress. This legislation would help schools and colleges make dramatic advancements in teaching and learning by creating a national center that advances high-risk, high-reward education research projects and by improving Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDSs). KA has extensive experience and expertise in identifying and promoting effective solutions to enhance the quality and accessibility of education.

The NEED Act would create a fifth center in the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the National Center for Advanced Development in Education (NCADE). NCADE would be dedicated to developing and disseminating innovative, cutting-edge practices and tools. KA has long advocated for increased funding for research and is especially supportive of the legislation's \$500 million authorization to dramatically expand education research and development (R&D). Three National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) reports released in spring 2022 (*A Pragmatic Future for NAEP: Containing Costs and Updating Technologies*; *The Future of Education Research at IES*, and *A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics*) all noted that the challenges IES faces in fulfilling its mission are exacerbated by the fact that it is underfunded. **This legislation's authorization of an enhanced investment in education R&D could result in high-value research opportunities that will positively impact education in the United States and KA supports this investment and the creation of NCADE at IES.**

Further, Knowledge Alliance members believe that restructuring the SLDS program, as provided for in H.R. 8548, would greatly strengthen the program by explicitly authorizing data systems, fully compliant with all privacy regulations, that link data on education (from early child education through postsecondary), workforce, nutrition, and social services programs. The creation of such an integrated system would aid policymakers in developing, implementing, and evaluating policies in multiple areas and provide researchers with a wealth of data that can greatly enhance their work. Moreover, modernizing and enhancing States' SLDSs should result in speedier collection and reporting of data.

For those reasons, Knowledge Alliance members are extremely hopeful that you will reintroduce the NEED Act in the 118th Congress. Should you decide to do so, we offer the following suggestions for revisions to H.R. 8548, which we believe will enhance the effectiveness of NCADE and SLDS in fostering innovation, accelerating student learning, and developing equitable and effective evidence-based practices.

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I. National Center for Advanced Development in Education

NCADE Mission

H.R. 8548 would amend the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA) by adding a new Section 195 that establishes NCADE. Section 195(b) would set forth the mission of the new center.

Knowledge Alliance endorses the current text of Section 195(b) but believes it would be enhanced by the addition of language highlighting that NCADE should: (1) fund projects jointly carried out by researchers and developers for the purpose of building effective educational “solutions” that can quickly scale up and be put into practice; and (2) be sensitive to needs identified in the field. We also see potential for the new center to support innovation around activities undertaken by other components of IES and the Department.

Further, we recommend that NCADE have, as one of its priority activities, supporting projects carried out by partnerships that, at a minimum, include researchers and State and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs). We make this recommendation because strong partnerships of researchers with SEAs and LEAs can ensure that innovations are high-quality, relevant, actionable, and affordable. All members of such a partnership would be instrumental in the conceiving of and the carrying out of grant, contract, and prize activities from the beginning.

Therefore, we recommend adding, at the end of Section 195(b), the following additional paragraphs.

“(8) support projects jointly carried out by, at a minimum (a) researchers and (b) State and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) for the purpose of creating innovations that can quickly scale up and be put into widespread practice, thus having a significant impact on students;

“(9) in carrying out its activities, solicit, consider, and be sensitive to needs identified through a process that involves stakeholders, including educational researchers and technical assistance providers;

“(10) support, as a priority, projects carried out jointly by partnerships, which at a minimum, include researchers and State or local educational agencies (or both), with all partners engaged in conception, development, implementation, scaling, and evaluation throughout the project life cycle; and

“(11) as appropriate, support research projects that build on and leverage activity undertaken by other components of the Institute and the Department.”

Evidence Based

Just like other IES centers, NCADE should encourage and, in some places require, the use of the standards of evidence enunciated in Section 8101(21) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). We note that the ESEA definition includes four evidence “tiers,” including “tier four,” which encompasses ideas that hold promise but do not yet have an evidence base qualifying for the top three levels, so long as those approaches are coupled with “ongoing efforts to examine the effects” of the activity, strategy, or intervention being studied. We believe that projects carried out with NCADE

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awards should meet the tier four evidence standard and should be supported by a well-defined logic model or theory of action supported by research.

Therefore, we recommend the following additional revisions to the mission section in proposed ESRA Section 195(b).

- In each of paragraphs (1), (2), and (3), insert “evidence-based” after “promote.”
- In paragraph (4), insert “evidence-based” after “evaluate.”
- In paragraph (5), in the language preceding subparagraph (A), insert “evidence-based” after “test.”
- In paragraph (6), in the language preceding subparagraph (A), after “provide” strike “recommended” and insert “evidence-based.”
- In paragraph (7)(B), insert “evidence-based” after “identifying.”
- In paragraph (7)(C), insert “evidence-based” after “developing.”

Further, in order to give meaning to this language, we recommend insertion in the bill of a new ESRA Section 199A reading as follows:

“SEC. 199A. DEFINITION.

“The term ‘evidence-based’ has the meaning given the term in section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).”

NCADE Plan

Under H.R. 8548, ESRA Section 197(b) would require the NCADE Commissioner to submit a research plan to the IES Director. KA believes that, in order to ensure that NCADE modifies its activities in response to new developments and needs, the plan should be updated periodically, such as once every three to five years. We recommend that the bill be revised accordingly.

Temporary Hiring

One of the strengths of the DARPA and the other advanced research agencies is that they have been able to bring on board, for a limited period of time, experts from academia and elsewhere who can lend their expertise on projects and issues of high priority. Indeed, IES already has the authority (in ESRA Section 188) to bring aboard, for temporary employment, a limited number of scientific and technical employees without regard to certain provisions of civil service law. And H.R. 8548 appears to envision NCADE making temporary hires by authorizing (in proposed ESRA Section 197(c)) IES to “appoint such employees as temporary fellows....” However, proposed Section 197(f), because of its inclusion of the clause “Notwithstanding section 188” and by making all professional hires subject to all civil service requirements, would appear to prevent NCADE from using IES’s authority. We recommend amending the bill to permit NCADE to use IES’s temporary hiring authority.

Evaluation

In the bill, proposed ESRA section 195(e)(1) would require the Advanced Development Commissioner to obtain an independent evaluation of NCADE and the projects it funds. We believe that the new center should be judged primarily based on the extent to which the innovations it supports achieve market

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penetration and, of course, outcomes for students, educators, or learning environments. This focus could be provided, in the bill by inserting “(in terms of market penetration and outcomes for students educators, or learning environments)” after “such awards and transactions” in section 195(e)(1)(A)(iii).

II. State Longitudinal Data Systems

Peer Review and Performance Measurement

Knowledge Alliance believes that the authorization for a new SLDS program would be strengthened by the inclusion of language ensuring that SLDS grants are made using a peer review process that ensures technical quality. Further, the statute should provide explicitly for the establishment of performance measures and evaluation requirements for gauging States’ progress in implementing their data systems. Therefore, we recommend the insertion of the following two subsections after Section3(b),

“(c) AWARDING OF GRANTS.— In awarding grants under this section, the Secretary shall use a peer review process that—

“(1) ensures technical quality (including validity and reliability), promotes linkages across States, and protects student privacy consistent with section 183 of the Education Sciences Reform Act (20 U.S.C. 9573); Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.).

“(2) promotes the generation and accurate and timely use of data that are needed—

“(A) for States and local educational agencies to comply with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.) and other reporting requirements, close achievement gaps, and improve teaching and school leadership; and

“(B) to facilitate research to improve student academic achievement, close achievement gaps, and improve teaching and school leadership; and

“(C) to align statewide, longitudinal data systems covering early education through postsecondary education (including pre-service educator preparation programs), and the workforce, consistent with privacy protections under section 183 of the Education Sciences Reform Act (20 U.S.C. 9573).

“(d) PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT.—Before awarding a grant under this section, the Secretary shall establish measurable performance indicators —

“(1) to be used to assess the ongoing progress and performance of eligible entities receiving a grant under this section; and

“(2) that address the requirements of paragraphs (1) through (3) of section 185 of the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (20 USC 9575).”

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Relevance, Dissemination, and Utilization

Knowledge Alliance strongly recommends that the NEED Act include language designed to ensure that the data included in State’s SLDSs are relevant, useful, and accessible, via current standard best practices in the information technology space. In addition, the bill should encourage coordination across States. We recommend the inclusion of the following language after the Section 3 language proposed above.

“(e) RELEVANCE, DISSEMINATION, AND UTILIZATION.—To ensure all activities authorized under this section are rigorous, relevant, and useful for researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and the public, the Secretary shall—

“(1) ensure that the data collected through SLDS systems are—

“(A) prepared —

“(i) in a timely fashion; and

“(ii) in alignment with national data interoperability standards as identified by the Secretary; and

“(B) accessible via standardized data transport interfaces to authorized users; and

“(2) promote the utilization of data collected through SLDS systems, including through the use of dissemination networks and technical assistance providers within the Institute of Education Sciences and the U.S. Department of Education;

“(3) monitor and manage the performance of all activities authorized under this title in accordance with section 185 of the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (20 U.S.C. 9575); and

“(4) support State coordinators in managing and overseeing the implementation of a State’s SLDS, including through coordination with other States.”

Coordination

Knowledge Alliance believes that the new SLDS authorization should include language authorizing awards for the purpose of encouraging interoperability across States’ SLDSs and greater communication, collaboration, and coordination across the States. Such awards would encourage greater consistency across the States and thus a for a more valuable national data system. We thus recommend inclusion of the following language after the Section 3 language proposed above.

“(3) IMPROVEMENT OF COORDINATION. — The Secretary, in consultation with the States, may make grants to, or enter into contracts with, eligible entities to encourage interoperability and improve the interstate and intrastate communication, collaboration, and coordination among States’ educational and workforce programs, which may include creation of a template SLDS software system for States to utilize.”

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TECHNICAL REVISIONS

Finally, we recommend the following technical corrections and clarifications to H.R. 8548.

- In the language proceeding the enactment clause, change “Institute for Education Sciences” to “Institute of Education Sciences.”
- In proposed ESRA Section 197(a)(3)(B), insert “innovations in” before “pedagogy.”
- In proposed ESRA Section 197(a)(3)(C), change “improve assessments” to “improvement of the assessments.”
- In proposed ESRA Section 197(a)(3)(D), change “carry” to “carrying.”
- In proposed ESRA Section 197(a)(3)(E), change “convene and engage” to “convening and engaging.”
- Change the title of proposed ESRA Section 197(d) to “Authorized Activities.”
- Change the title of proposed ESRA Section 197(d)(2) to “Requirements Related to Provision of Funding.”
- In Section 198(b)(2)(A)(iv), change “Committee on Education and Labor” to “Committee on Education and the Workforce.”
- In Section 3(a), change “data of” to “data on.”
- Change the title of current Section 3(d)(2) to “Program Management and Technical Assistance.”
- Add at the end of current Section 3(e)(1)(A), “as defined in section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. 7801).”
- In paragraph (a), row 15, change “State” to “Statewide.”

On behalf of the members of the Knowledge Alliance, thank your considering our recommendations on this important legislation. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Rachel Dinkes