



March 23, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Committee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Chair  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Murray, Collins, Baldwin and Capito,

We are writing to urge you **to provide at least \$100 million for the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) program and \$40 million for the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grants for fiscal year 2024.** Data systems are an indispensable tool for making informed decisions about priorities within communities, and existing state data systems are ill-equipped to address the complex and intertwined challenges that have emerged as a result of a multi-year pandemic. States need federal support to evolve their data systems so that they are oriented toward access and support responsive policymaking. Currently the best mechanism for providing federal financial support is bolstering funding through the SLDS and WDQI grant programs.

SLDS and WDQI grants, and related agency technical assistance, support state policymakers, practitioners, individuals, and other stakeholders responsible for improving data collection and use. Since their creation, the SLDS and WDQI grant programs have helped states establish longitudinal data systems that provide families, students, educators, workforce leaders, and other officials with better, more timely data while protecting that data. These data systems help policymakers and practitioners answer questions about program outcomes and make key information transparent to families, students, and the public. They also support program evaluations and studies that examine long-term learning and other trends and identify opportunity gaps.

Unfortunately, many data systems are outdated, siloed, and under equipped to meet current needs. For example, according to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Education, just 31 percent of SLDS states and territories surveyed reported that K-12 student data was linked to workforce data.<sup>1</sup> Only 53 and 51 percent reported linkages to early childhood and postsecondary data, respectively. Another report found that just 18 states have full pre-k through workforce data systems.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Profile of State Data Capacity in 2018: Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Survey Descriptive Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/Pubs2021/2021126/>

<sup>2</sup> Education Commission of the States. 50-State Comparison: State Longitudinal Data Systems. <https://www.ecs.org/state-longitudinal-data-systems/>

States and localities need federal support to update critical data infrastructure so it evolves to support nimble decisionmaking and drive positive impacts for individuals and communities. Updating state data systems and programs – from early childhood through the workforce – will enable them to be more effective, accountable, and efficient including by:

- Assisting parents in enrolling their children in early learning programs to boost kindergarten readiness rates and enable parents to return to work.
- Connecting students and families to wrap-around services designed to accelerate learning loss exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Auto-admitting eligible high school students into college to reverse major postsecondary enrollment declines.
- Providing a more complete picture of the value of postsecondary pathways so students and job seekers can make informed decisions about which education and career pathways are right for them, and policymakers can identify which approaches work and which do not.
- Identifying unemployed or underemployed workers who are eligible for Pell Grants or other sources of financial aid to support enrollment in postsecondary education or training to reskill and upskill for new careers.

Modernizing state data systems to meet these needs requires robust data governance, privacy, and security. Joint privacy guidance for SLDS and WDQI grantees will help them develop effective, integrated data systems and the policies and procedures that safeguard data. Federal agencies also should provide the technical assistance states need to ensure robust privacy and transparency safeguards are in place.

A new investment in these programs - \$100 million for SLDS and \$40 million for WDQI – would enable planning for the next evolution of state data systems; support updates to data system technology; build stronger data linkages between early learning, elementary and secondary, and postsecondary education, workforce, health, and other data systems; support the human capacity needed to use and manage the information effectively and securely; publish better quality data about individual performance along the education-to-workforce pipeline; and support the creation of research-practice partnerships. Investing in data infrastructure will, most importantly, provide state and local leaders the ability to better serve their communities.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress to make this vision a success.

Sincerely,

Advance CTE  
All4Ed  
America Forward  
America Succeeds  
City Year Inc.  
Credential Engine, Inc.  
Data Foundation  
Data Quality Campaign  
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)  
Knowledge Alliance  
National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)  
National Center for Learning Disabilities

National Council on Teacher Quality  
National Skills Coalition  
National Urban League  
New America Higher Education Program  
Results for America  
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association  
StriveTogether  
Teach Plus  
The Education Trust  
Third Way  
UnidosUS