

# knowledge alliance

## Knowledge Alliance Submission to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee on the Advancing Research in Education Act<sup>1</sup>

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Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy,

I am writing to provide the recommendations of Knowledge Alliance (KA) on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee's recently released draft of the reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA), the Advancing Research in Education Act (AREA). Knowledge Alliance, a non-partisan, non-profit organization, is composed of leading education organizations committed since 1971 to the cutting-edge, effective use of high-quality and relevant data, research, evaluation, and innovation in education policy and practice at all levels. Our members have long and extensive experience carrying out research, evaluations, data collections, technical assistance, and dissemination activities authorized by ESRA.

KA commends Chair Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy on this significant milestone in education policy. The release of AREA is an important step forward in the reauthorization of ESRA which, if it became law, would provide needed updates to our nation's education research infrastructure. We know that the release of AREA is a result of months of important bipartisan work and engagement with the education community.

KA appreciates the changes included in AREA to ensure research, evidence and evaluation is usable and responsive to the needs of States, practitioners and students. We note that there is strong language that prioritizes research that will help close achievement gaps and increase equity in our education systems, both of which KA strongly supports as a vision for the future of IES and our education infrastructure.

KA specifically would like to thank the Committee for the inclusion of the language on the principles of scientifically valid research. Additionally, we commend the HELP Committee for the inclusion of the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and the Comprehensive Centers (CCs) in AREA. We know how critical these centers are in ensuring that research is locally-driven and can be translated, disseminated and most importantly utilized by States, districts and schools. You will see in our recommendations below that we believe there are some ways in which we can fine tune the language to ensure the critical work of these centers can be

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<sup>1</sup> Page and line numbers are based on the draft bill distributed by the HELP Committee on 12/1/23.

strengthened. Additionally, KA is supportive of the language in AREA regarding the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS). We believe the language included in AREA that highlights the need for interoperability and data integration is paramount to ensuring SLDS is strengthened and can be sustainable.

We again thank the Committee for their work on AREA and appreciate the inclusion of so many important changes that will strengthen and modernize our education research infrastructure. We encourage the Committee to listen to the needs and perspectives of the education field on how to continue to strengthen the bill as we move forward together in this process. Please see below for KA's recommendations on AREA:

## I. Policy Recommendations

### 1. Align Evidence Based Definition to ESEA to Maintain High Standard of Evidence, Efficiency and Clarity

On page 8, strike lines 13-18 (section 102(15)) and replace with:

“(15) EVIDENCE-BASED.

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

Context: To meet these important goals, federal statute should provide a framework to States, districts, schools, and practitioners to assist them in classifying evidence. Provides for a more consistent definition of “evidence” across ED programs and statutes.

### 2. Clarifying the Unique Role of the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs)

On page 51, strike lines 35-36 (section 157(d)) and insert:

“(d) ACTIVITIES. – Each Regional Educational Laboratory awarded a contract under this section shall design and conduct applied research, evidence development, data analysis, analytical support, and evaluation, including through such activities as—”

Context: Provides a more complete summation of the responsibilities of the RELs and clarifies that the specific activities listed in subsection(d) are examples of activities that may be carried out. The revised language would more specifically differentiate the mission and work of the RELs from that of the CCs.

### 3. Clarifying the Description of REL Activities

On page 52, line 11 (section 157(d)(4), delete “, and piloting or scaling relevant evidence-based practices”.

On page 52, delete lines 18-22 (section 157(d)(6)).

Context: The proposed changes would delete two activities (piloting and scaling practices and providing training on evidence utilization) that the bill assigns to the RELs but that are more appropriately carried out by the CCs. These changes would help clarify the difference between the missions of the two types of entities.

#### 4. Clarifying the Unique Role of the Comprehensive Centers (CCs)

Change page 70. Lines 16-19 (section 207(f)) to read:

“(f) ACTIVITIES. – Each comprehensive center established under this section shall work collaboratively with State educational agencies to support local educational agencies, regional educational agencies, and schools in improving educational outcomes for all students, closing achievement gaps, and improving the quality of instruction, including by providing support on implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301ff). A comprehensive center shall carry out this mission through such activities as—”

Context: Provides a more accurate summation of the mission of the CCs (which is to work primarily through SEAs in addressing the needs of LEAs, REAs, and schools) and clarifies that the activities listed in subsection (f) are examples of the activities CCs can carry out.

#### 5. Authorizing ED to Fund a Sufficient Number of Comprehensive Centers to Enable them to Meet the Needs of the States

On page 76, line 15 (section 207(a)(1)), strike “11” and insert “19.”

Context: Current law requires that there be not less than 20 CCs. In implementing current law, ED is funding 19 regional centers and one national center. The proposal of 11 Comprehensive Centers is too small to achieve the goals of AREA. Fewer Comprehensive Centers serving more States limits their ability to support locally-driven research and provide contextualized, targeted support to individual States.

## II. Technical Recommendations

#### 6. Creation of the Alternative Student Poverty Measure

On page 33, line 9 (section 143(a)(10)), strike “in coordination” and insert “jointly.”

Context: This amendment would make the development of an alternative measure of student poverty a joint effort between NCES and the Census Bureau, rather an activity that NCES carries out in consultation with Census. It would reflect that most of the Federal expertise on

and experience with child poverty data is in the Census Bureau, within the Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program. The SAIPE staff developed the methodology for, and annually compute, the annual poverty estimates that the Department of Education uses to allocate Title I funds to States and LEAs. Thus, it would be appropriate to assign this new responsibility jointly to NCES and Census rather than lodging it entirely with NCES.

## 7. Supporting Research on and Evaluations of Program Implementation

On page 23, line 34 (section 131(b)(1)), insert “(including research on the implementation of education programs, policies, strategies, practices, and interventions)” after “sustained research”.

On page 43, line 16 (section 151(b)(2)), insert “and implementation” after “impact.”

On page 54, after line 10, insert:

“(ii) by inserting “(including research on the implementation of programs, policies, strategies, practices, and interventions)” after “sustained research”.

On page 54, line 11, change “(ii)” to “(iii)”.

Context: This language would clarify that NCER and NCSEER have the authority to support research on the implementation of programs, policies, strategies, practices, and interventions and that NCEE may support evaluations of the implementation of Federal education programs. Careful research on the implementation of a new policy or program provides valuable information that program designers and practitioners can use to modify and improve programs. Further, implementation evaluations have long been a component of the ED evaluation agenda, and they are valued by policymakers (including in Congress) for the information they provide about how the Federal programs are implemented in the field.

## 8. Correcting a Mistaken Reference to REL “grants”

On page 51, line 18 (section 157(c)(2)(B)), change “grant” to “contract.”

Context: The language reads “during the period of the grant” but, as provided elsewhere in the bill, the RELs receive contracts.

## 9. Narrowing the RELs’ Exemption from the Requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act

On page 54, line 3, insert “except when such collection of information is carried out at the direction of the Commissioner” after “regional educational laboratories”.

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Context: We applaud the provision in the bill that would add a Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) exemption for the RELs when they carry out voluntary collections of information during the conduct of research. This exemption is highly appropriate when the RELs collect information at the direction of their partners in the States. It is much less supportable when the RELs undertake information collections at the direction of IES. The proposed language would thus clarify that, when the RELs conduct surveys for IES, they would still need to go through PRA clearance, just as is the case with the other surveys conducted by IES, other ED offices, and other Federal agencies.

