

Month XX, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202
Dear Secretary McMahon,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to urge you to **ensure access to high-quality, protected federal data sources and systems by sustaining data collection efforts, contracts, interagency agreements, privacy protections, and adequate staffing to oversee efforts that strengthen the education and workforce data ecosystem.** We appreciate your commitment to strengthening and rebuilding the federal government's research and data infrastructure in a way that promotes greater efficiency, reduces redundancy, and ensures responsible use of public resources. This commitment serves as a critical foundation for ensuring that data collection and reporting remain a core function of the federal government. Federal-level data and the research it enables are critical to states' ability to understand the broader education and workforce landscape, how they compare to other states in terms of resources and outcomes, and what is working in other states. Without this information and with more limited support for providers overall, states are left to navigate solutions to student, family, and worker needs, without crucial context from comparable data in other states or evidence of what works.

As the U.S. Department of Education (ED) aims to increase state autonomy over educational systems, federal data and research will become increasingly vital to enabling states to make informed, efficient, and effective decisions about policy and resource allocation. As former ED Secretaries William Bennett and Lamar Alexander recently noted, while the Department "does three things that matter — all of which need overhauling but all of which are far too important to discard," one of the most essential is The Nation's Report Card, which "helps us know how students are performing." Preserving and strengthening these longstanding federal data tools is essential to ensuring states continue to have the insights they need.

Data systems are an indispensable tool for individuals, institutions, and state leaders to make informed decisions about education and workforce priorities within communities. The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) resource, "[Legislators Need Meaningful Access to Data](#)," highlights how legislators can utilize data to answer questions and take action to enhance their state's education system and support its economic future. Federal data plays a crucial role in state decision-making; for instance, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores and Common Core of Data (CCD) fiscal files collectively reveal comparative outcomes and resource allocation between states, providing insights into cost-effective choices that advance academic learning. Furthermore, through existing state and federal data systems, states are working to provide members of the public with the insights they need to make informed decisions about their education and career pathways. This kind of data transparency can only be achieved through robust data systems. States need federal support and access to data for responsive policymaking, including decisions on how they allocate resources from the state to local educational agencies (LEAs).

The recent terminations and reductions of data collection-related contracts, interagency agreements, and staff layoffs at ED, particularly those that oversee education and workforce development grant programs and provide technical assistance and support to state data leaders, imperil the ability of states to leverage

data to advance students' academic achievement and economic mobility. For instance, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that has been impacted by recent contract terminations. While IPEDS can currently collect data, contracts that support the analytical and quality control aspects of the data collection have not yet been renewed and are anticipated to be renewed at a severely reduced level. In addition, the reduction in force of core IT support for the collection of this data, has dramatically impacted the ability of institutions to submit this data promptly and these disruptions threaten the underlying data quality of the dataset. This further undermines the Department's ability to provide parents and students with accurate information about postsecondary pathways, as the IPEDS underpin the US Department of Education's signature parent and student information product on postsecondary outcomes - the College and Career Scorecard. With the current resource allocation, we anticipate reductions to or elimination of technical assistance and support, resulting in severe impacts to the quality and usability of IPEDS data going forward. Similarly, contract terminations have negatively impacted DataLab, which offers public access to education data nationwide, as the terminations limit the website's public accessibility and overall effectiveness. Low-quality data or inaccessible data is equivalent to having no data at all. Enabling states to use federal data requires adequate staffing and resources for all of these crucial steps. The datasets maintained at ED undergird distribution mechanisms for Title IA and other grants and without high quality data, funding may not be dispersed to school districts as intended or in a timely manner, a concern we are already hearing from local leaders.

State and local governments, advocates, researchers, and community-based organizations need federal partnership to effectively collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to inform decision-making and drive positive impacts for individuals and communities. State and local data leaders rely on federal data to enable state education and data systems—from early childhood through K–12, postsecondary, and workforce—to be more effective, accountable, and efficient by enabling leaders to:

- **Connect employers with local students participating in career and technical education programs of interest to the employer.** For instance, Indiana's Department of Workforce Development uses its State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS), developed and maintained with federal support and technical assistance, to power tools like Pivot, a workforce recommendation engine. Pivot integrates education, workforce, and unemployment data to help students and job seekers identify career paths that align with their unique skills and experiences. Federal investment in SLDS infrastructure enables states to build these kinds of innovative tools, which in turn support stronger alignment between education and labor market needs.
- **Support states adopting tools, strategies, and pedagogy to support the Science of Reading.** Mississippi leveraged investments in education research and development (R&D) to revamp its approach to literacy instruction. This included implementing the Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling program, which trains teachers in the science of reading. The state used data, including potentially federal data like the Nation's Report Card (NAEP), to track its progress in literacy education. This allowed them to measure the impact of their initiatives and demonstrate improvement. After implementing their evidence-based approach for eight years, Mississippi saw a significant improvement in fourth-grade reading scores on the NAEP, moving up 28 places to rank 21st nationally. They continue to use NAEP and NCES to support this work.
- **Create rich geographic and demographic insights to support targeted education policy and investment.** With access to NCES geolocation and urbanicity data, IPEDS, the Condition of Education, and Census Bureau TIGER/Line files, the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC) at the University of Illinois creates accurate maps and demographic profiles of school districts, neighborhoods, and higher education institutions. These data tools allow IWERC to

analyze the geographic and socioeconomic context in which students learn—helping state and local leaders identify gaps in access, target underserved communities, and design policies that respond to local needs. This level of precision is essential for making data-informed decisions about school funding, program implementation, and workforce development strategies—especially in resource-constrained regions.

- **Identify the extent to which the needs of students with disabilities are being consistently met.** Local and state advocates rely on data on student access to general education classrooms that is required by IDEA section 618 to hold LEAs accountable for appropriately serving children. For example, special education advocates have used data collected in line with federal requirements to analyze the level of inclusion for students with particular disabilities and identified troubling inconsistencies that have prompted districts to review their criteria for determining the least restrictive environment.
- **Access and implement research and evidence-based interventions to support student achievement.** The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) is an online library of education research, reviewed and sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). The vast majority of districts - even large urban districts - do not have the funding to obtain their own research library subscriptions. Instead, they rely on ERIC to access high-quality research and evidence that supports their implementation of effective interventions and programs.

Federal data isn't just a resource for state and local leaders—it also empowers families and communities to make informed decisions about their daily lives.

- **Help families make informed decisions about schools when relocating.** When families move to a new city, they often rely on school quality indicators to guide housing and enrollment choices. The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), maintained by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, plays a critical role in this process. Through partnerships with platforms like GreatSchools.org, which incorporates CRDC data on disability resources and school climate, parents can access tools embedded in widely used sites like Zillow to compare schools based on inclusion metrics and other equity indicators. This empowers families, particularly those with children who have disabilities, to identify schools that best meet their needs and make better-informed housing decisions.

State and local leaders need access to federal data that supports their efforts to support students, investigate new policy questions, and effectively direct the future of state and local education and workforce investments. As the examples above demonstrate, federal data drive stronger education and workforce systems at the state and local level. Ongoing collaboration and support from federal partners are critical to ensuring that state and local leaders can use federal data in ways that most benefit students, workers, families, employers, and communities.

We would be pleased to discuss this further with you or your staff at your convenience. Robin Steans, President, Advance Illinois, rsteans@advanceillinois.org would happily facilitate a conversation.

Sincerely,

Advance Illinois

[insert final list of organizations]