



July 22, 2025

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

Dear Secretary McMahon,

On behalf of [Knowledge Alliance](#) (KA), we urge you to preserve and strengthen the Federal education research and development (R&D) system. As the Administration looks ahead, this is a critical moment to modernize and elevate the impact of Federal investments that support evidence-based teaching and learning in every State and community.

KA is a non-profit, non-partisan organization composed of leading education organizations dedicated to empowering schools, districts and all 50 States with the tools and resources needed to improve learning and outcomes for every student. KA members partner with States and districts to advance their education goals and address pressing academic challenges—such as literacy, math performance and school improvement. Their work also provides parents and families with the information needed to support student success.

As the Department considers how to best support students and educators in the years ahead, we offer a vision to strengthen and modernize the Federal education research and development (R&D) system. Our recommendations reflect the on-the-ground experience of our members and their deep partnerships with States, districts and schools nationwide. We believe Federal R&D can be a powerful engine for educational improvement—if it is responsive, coordinated and built for impact.

Fueling What Works: Strengthening Federal Education Research and Development for the Long Term

America's public education system is being asked to do more than ever before. Students, educators, school leaders and families are working hard to support learning, keep up with rapid technological changes both at home and in the classroom, and help young people prepare for an increasingly complex college and career landscape. Yet despite these efforts, test scores are declining nationwide, and 48 States report teacher shortages. At the same time, other countries are making major gains in STEM education and innovation. This is about more than an education crisis—it is about our economic future and national security. The students in our classrooms today will either fuel America's competitive edge or watch it slip away to nations that made smarter, evidence-based investments in education.

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In light of these challenges:

- **Parents** want to know that their child's (or children's) school is using evidence-based curriculum and practices, and how they can support learning and development at home.
- **School leaders** need to know how to support **teachers and students** with tools and strategies that actually work.
- **State and local decision-makers** need data and evidence to understand how to invest taxpayer dollars wisely in our education system.

Achieving these goals is not possible without a strong Federal research and development system that generates evidence on what works and supports State and local efforts to implement evidence-based policies and programs. A strong Federal research and development system ensures State and local leaders have the shared tools, data and evidence needed to make evidence-based decisions. In the absence of this support, well-intentioned efforts risk being shaped by incomplete information and fragmented solutions—slowing progress of ensuring teachers and students have tools and strategies that actually work.

The U.S. Department of Education R&D system represents a critical cross-country link, capable of leveraging a relatively small percentage of national education spending to efficiently and effectively pool expertise and disseminate information that helps State and local education agencies drive evidence-based outcomes, scale what works and avoid reinventing the wheel when it comes to improving student outcomes.

Given this critical moment for education, now is not the time to roll back this important work. Now is the time to build on progress, improving the system where needed to ensure we are effectively supporting students, educators and everyone in our school communities. This is a critical time for the Administration to preserve and strengthen the essential role of education research and development to support parents, educators and policymakers in improving student outcomes.

Knowledge Alliance's vision for the future is grounded in our experience and that of our members—who have partnered with Federal, State and local governments, schools, educators and families. To make the Federal R&D system an even more powerful force multiplier and resource for school leaders, educators and parents, we believe Federal policy and investments need to focus on (1) research that addresses pressing needs; (2) maximizing impact through coordination, scale and shared data infrastructure; and (3) supporting implementation of evidence-based policies and practices.

1. Prioritize Research that Addresses Pressing State and Local Needs

Federal investments must support research that addresses the questions educators, school leaders and policymakers are asking. Research should be informed by the field, not just conducted on it. Investments should reflect this principle by partnering with practitioners to co-develop applied research focused on real-world challenges.

2. Maximize Impact Through Coordination, Scale, and Data Infrastructure

Federal leadership is uniquely positioned to identify shared priorities across States, conduct national evaluations of promising approaches, run large scale national surveys that examine programs success and failures and support scaling of solutions that emerge from policy and practice. Research plays a vital role in helping us answer key questions about what works in education, but generating knowledge is only the first step. To truly improve outcomes for all students, we must have a coordinated system of understanding how States and school leaders can put that research into practice, adapt it to diverse contexts and scale it effectively. This is where the Federal government has an essential role—supporting the translation of findings into usable tools, policies and practices that can be scaled. Critical to this process is rigorous evaluation, which helps determine whether programs are actually working and if we are seeing a return on Federal investment. None of this is possible without comparable data that only the Federal government is positioned to fund and maintain. All of these pieces—data, research, implementation and evaluation are far more efficient and effective when coordinated at the Federal level. It streamlines efforts, reduces duplication and ensures that the best solutions are shared with every State regardless of size or resources.

3. Help States and Districts Turn Knowledge into Impact by Communicating and Supporting What Works

The goal of research and evaluation is not just discovery and accountability, but improvement. Federal investments support the translation of evidence into policy and practice, the scaling of effective strategies and build the capacity of State and local systems to use research well. To be clear, this is a two-way exchange: just as research informs practice, practice should inform what research gets done and how it is shared. In that way, the focus of research is driven by the States, not the Federal government.

What the Administration Can Do Now

The education research field has made significant breakthroughs and achieved important progress. Our goal now must be to build on that progress. That will not be possible if we are starting from scratch – we should maintain and release funding for impactful, responsive research and development activities. Additionally, the Administration can also take actions now to reform and streamline program implementation to ensure that those dollars are spent efficiently to maximize impact.

Prioritize Research that Addresses Pressing State and Local Needs

- Assemble education experts, policy makers and educators from across the country to identify a limited number of the most urgent needs or research questions in education.
- Ensure that research yields meaningful and actionable insights, and that those insights are translated into practical tools, guidance and decision-support systems for decision-makers

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across all levels of the education system, including teachers, school leaders and district and State administrators.

- Create faster research tracks for high-need topics, using IES' Seedlings to Scale as a model for success.
- Prioritize rapid-cycle tools like the School PULSE survey to deliver real-time data to States and districts.
- Streamline low-risk study approvals by decentralizing IES review processes and accelerating launch and response timelines.

Maximize Impact Through Coordination, Scale and Infrastructure

- Fix bureaucratic bottlenecks and reduce Federal reporting burden. Modernizations like the innovative 2024 creation of EDPass which modernized and transformed the way States submit Federal reports to *EDfacts*, reduced data submitter burden and enabled faster public reporting.
- Make it possible to see results by State in NCES sample surveys by reimagining existing sampling frame methodologies. Consider flexible pathways to achieve State level representativeness such as offering the option to opt into State-representative samples, perhaps through matched funds, or Federal incentives, selecting a subset of survey variables most relevant to State priorities, rotating State-focused cycles across different years of datasets, similar to what NAEP has done with TUDA.
- Leverage Regional Education Laboratories to focus on supporting State and local data and evidence needs aimed at addressing the most pressing challenges schools and States face, and Comprehensive Centers to focus on supporting implementation of evidence-based policies and practices.

Help States and Districts Turn Knowledge into Impact by Communicating and Supporting What Works

- In addition to current communication methods, modernize outreach efforts by harnessing new technologies such as AI and social media and approaches such as professional networks and coaching structures in school districts. These streamlined techniques reach teachers frequently and repeatedly to provide up-to-date, trustworthy information on what works, where and why.
- Focus on the “last mile” of ensuring that research-based instruction gets to the classroom by requiring every applicable IES-funded research study on policy and practice to include a practitioner-facing implementation resource.

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- Create a culture that prioritizes understanding and using research among education leaders—such as superintendents, principals and curriculum specialists. Do so by establishing a national recognition program—similar to Blue Ribbon Schools or Teacher of the Year—that honors districts effectively using research and evidence-based policy to improve student achievement.
- Annually convene State leaders to discuss how they can better support their local leaders in implementing research within their unique school contexts.

With decisive administrative action, the Federal education research system can become faster, more responsive, and more useful – supporting students, educators and families today and positioning the system for long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Sincerely,



Rachel Dinkes
President & CEO