



April 6, 2026

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Committee  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Chair  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Ranking Member  
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Collins, Murray, Capito, and Baldwin,

The Data Quality Campaign (DQC) and the undersigned organizations are writing to urge you to provide at least **\$60 million for the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) grant program and \$12 million for the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant program** for fiscal year 2027. This joint request for both grant programs includes two years of funding, which the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the US Department of Labor (DOL) should have in reserve as they begin the next grant cycles for each program. These investments should be accompanied by enough staff capacity to meet all statutory deadlines, duties, and requirements of supervising a competition and the ultimate awardees' efforts.

The timing is right to initiate new grant cycles. Dr. Amber Northern's recent report for the US Department of Education (ED), [Reimagining the Institute of Education Sciences](#), affirms the important role of the SLDS grant program within the larger education research and development ecosystem. The report [recommends](#) that IES continue to "support technological investments that upgrade and modernize SLDS infrastructure and delivery mechanisms" while simultaneously updating the SLDS grant program.

Moreover, the Workforce Pell grant program—aimed at increasing the availability of financial assistance to students interested in postsecondary programs that lead quickly to high-wage, high-skill, or in-demand jobs—will begin this year. It will rely heavily on administrative data to ensure program quality. States currently have some, but not all, of the data elements and linkages necessary to ensuring a smooth and effective Workforce Pell grant program. With a new round of SLDS and WDQI grants, states could fast track their efforts to provide a strong data foundation for this new workforce program.

Beyond the immediate need to support the Workforce Pell program, the SLDS and WDQI grant programs play an essential role in assisting states with the design, development, implementation, security, and use of longitudinal data systems more broadly. Research, data collection, and evaluation are essential to helping Congress answer fundamental questions about student achievement and related outcomes and ensuring

taxpayer dollars are being used effectively. It is important that the SLDS and WDQI programs continue to be funded sustainably to ensure transparency into program outcomes and funding effectiveness.

Data systems are an indispensable tool for making informed decisions about priorities within communities. DQC's infographic, [Grace's Path to Success](#), highlights how students and their families can use data about needed skills, job options, and available postsecondary programs to successfully chart their course into high-quality, in-demand careers. Through their existing data systems, states are working to provide students like Grace with the insights they need to make informed decisions about their career pathways. Scores on the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress highlight the complex and intertwined academic challenges facing our country and demonstrate the importance of ensuring that students have information to make thoughtful decisions about their academic paths in relation to where they hope to go. Federal support is required to develop and maintain robust data systems. Currently, the best mechanism for providing federal financial support is bolstering funding through the SLDS and WDQI grant programs.

SLDS and WDQI grants—alongside related agency technical assistance and guidance—support state policymakers, practitioners, individuals, and others responsible for improving data collection and use. Since their creation, the SLDS and WDQI grant programs have helped states establish longitudinal data systems that both safeguard data and provide families, students, educators, workforce leaders, and other officials access to better, timelier information. These data systems are valuable because they:

- Provide state policymakers with access to information that helps them understand postsecondary program outcomes, student pathways, and labor market needs;
- Enable policymakers to make key information transparent to families, students, and the public;
- Advance work on transparency through the use of open, linked, and interoperable data; and
- 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 and future needs. For example, according to a DQC analysis of the most recent National Center for Education Statistics SLDS survey data, over 90 percent of states reported collecting data across multiple agencies.<sup>1</sup> However, only 21 states have successfully linked their data systems from early childhood all the way through to the workforce.<sup>2</sup>

States and localities need federal support to update critical data infrastructure so that it encourages nimble decisionmaking and drives positive impacts for individuals and communities. Updating state data systems and programs—from early childhood through K–12, postsecondary, and workforce—will enable data systems to be more effective, accountable, and efficient by enabling leaders to:

- **Identify 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.** Connecticut used integrated data in its SLDS, DataLinkCT (formerly P20 WIN), to develop a report that highlights trends to better understand and re-engage youth who are neither working nor in school.

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Profile of State Data Capacity in 2019 and 2020: Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Survey Descriptive Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2022/2022051.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Education Commission of the States. 50-State Comparison: Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems 2024. <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/statewide-longitudinal-data-systems-2024>

- **Promote the alignment of education and career training programs to workforce needs so individuals are prepared for high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand careers that are critical to a state’s economy and infrastructure.** Kentucky uses integrated workforce and postsecondary data in its SLDS, Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS), to align education and workforce and programs with evolving labor market demands through the Kentucky Future Skills Report, a tool that enables local leaders to conduct supply-demand analyses by incorporating typical outcomes data, such as wages and employment rates, alongside occupational projections and high-need industry trends.
- **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’s Pivot tool is a workforce recommendation engine that integrates the SLDS data from education and workforce (including unemployment insurance records) to help jobseekers identify career paths that align with their unique skills and experiences.
- **Streamline admissions processes for eligible high school students to reverse major postsecondary enrollment declines.** The California State University System is facilitating an automated admissions initiative with California’s college and career readiness platform, CaliforniaColleges.edu, to support transcript submission verification.
- **Provide 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.** Minnesota’s Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS) combines data from the state’s Office of Higher Education and the Department of Employment and Economic Development to produce the Graduate Employment Outcomes tool, which enables program evaluation and career planning through detailed insights into employment rates, wages, and industry sectors for graduates.

Modernizing state data systems to meet these needs requires robust data governance, privacy, and security. States are leading the way on implementing these foundational elements. But ongoing collaboration and support from federal leaders is critical to ensuring that state data systems can be used in ways that most benefit students, workers, and families. In particular, support is needed to ensure states are prepared to implement a high-quality Workforce Pell grant program that prepares students for in-demand careers. **As such we encourage you to provide at least \$60 million in funding for the SLDS grant program and \$12 million in funding for the WDQI grant program in fiscal year 2027.**<sup>3</sup>

We would be pleased to talk with you or your staff in more detail about this request. DQC’s Vice President, Federal Policy Kate Tromble ([kate@dataqualitycampaign.org](mailto:kate@dataqualitycampaign.org)) would be happy to facilitate a conversation.

Sincerely,

Advance CTE  
 All4Ed  
 Alliance for Learning Innovation (ALI)  
 America Forward  
 Association of Public Data Users  
 City Year  
 Connecticut Cradle to Career Coalition  
 Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)

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<sup>3</sup> Previously, both Chambers have considered [legislation](#) with robust, thoughtful reforms that would help states adopt these components and modernize their systems in a manner that could better support students and their families. We encourage Congress to revisit those proposals in addition to its funding decisions.

Cradle to Career Partnership  
Credential Engine  
Data Foundation  
Data Quality Campaign  
EdTrust  
Education Partnerships Coalition of Minnesota  
FutureFit AI  
Healthy Community Initiative  
Higher Expectations for Racine County  
Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)  
Knowledge Alliance  
Milwaukee Succeeds  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Council on Teacher Quality  
New America Higher Education Program  
Per Scholas  
Promise Partnership Utah  
Results for America  
Rocky Mountain Partnership Cradle to Career Colorado  
StriveTogether  
The Commit Partnership  
The Northside Achievement Zone  
Third Way  
UnidosUS  
United Way of Central Minnesota  
United Way of Salt Lake