

May 29, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
135 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Murray, and Ranking Member Cole:

We are writing to request at least \$35.3 million in funding for the State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) Grant Program in the final FY 2020 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, which is the level included in the FY20 House Labor/HHS/Education bill. As members of the Postsecondary Data Collaborative, a nonpartisan coalition of organizations representing students, higher education institutions, states, employers, and privacy and security experts who are committed to using high-quality postsecondary data to increase student success and reduce educational inequity, we know firsthand the impact these grants have on improving transparency through supporting state longitudinal data systems.

The U.S. Department of Education launched the SLDS Grant program in 2005 to provide funding – via the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) – to enhance the states’ ability to manage, analyze, and use administrative education records. This funding has supported 47 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa in developing and administering these systems.

SLDS are designed to produce actionable information about state’s education-to-workforce pipelines. With them, states can analyze and implement evidence-based policy improvements, and educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders can make informed decisions about how to improve outcomes for students. Federal SLDS Grants were created with the goals of improving data quality, promoting data linkages, and facilitating research to improve student achievement and identify and address equity gaps for historically disadvantaged students.¹ Maintained support for the federal SLDS Grant program is necessary to help states achieve these goals. Federal investment in the SLDS system has been the primary impetus for states in building more robust data systems and supporting actionable research. Continued investments will play a crucial role in improving data use in addressing

¹ U.S. Department of Education. Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slds/pdf/SLDS_overview_July2017.pdf

college access, completion, and career readiness. Without federal funding, states will face additional barriers in continuing to build, develop, and implement data systems.

The initial goals of the SLDS Grant program were to help states invest in the physical and technical infrastructure of their data systems and to develop data sharing agreements necessary to build connections across disparate data sources. The success of the first SLDS grants led to additional funding rounds to build on early successes, working in later phases to move states from building data systems toward putting those data to good use. Continued federal investment will allow states to go beyond basic reporting functions, building their capacity to use data in innovative, sustainable, and secure ways. In addition to the grants, SLDS investments also fund the Department of Education's State Support Team, which provides technical assistance to states on SLDS' implementation.

For example, using SLDS grant funding:

- **Connecticut** trained staff from local education agencies on the appropriate use of data, decision support tools, and privacy and security protocols.
- **Hawai'i** established the Data eXchange Partnership which has supported research on educational outcomes of Hawai'i citizens including pathways that lead to STEM careers and workforce preparation for education and health care careers.
- **Iowa** produced more consistent and comparable information for students, institutions, and policymakers through the creation of Iowa's data warehouse system called EdInsight.
- **Missouri** established a data system called MOSIS, which has helped the state better define, collect, store, and provide education data to both schools and policymakers to improve decision-making.
- **Oklahoma** developed the Insight Dashboard, a user interface for state agencies to analyze education data.
- **Texas** collected additional student performance data which enhanced state-level analysis capabilities and allowed Education Research Centers (ERCs) to advance research on important state higher education issues, helping to bridge the gap between policymakers and academic research.
- **Washington** constructed the Washington State P-20W system (WSP-20W) to provide better information to their residents about educational outcomes.

We urge Congress to fund the SLDS Grant program at least at the level included in the FY20 House Labor/HHS/Education bill in order to increase the utility and capacity of state systems, build on previous investments, and assist in reaching the full potential of SLDS grants. States want to strengthen their data infrastructure and linkages, contribute to improved data access and use for evidence-based policymaking, invest in training and data governance, and build their capacity to secure and protect data, and sustained federal investments will allow them to do so. The SLDS Grant program is invaluable and funding must be provided to allow these systems to continue to operate and be strengthened.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. If you have any questions about these comments, please contact Mamie Voight, vice president of policy research at the Institute for Higher Education Policy (mvoight@ihep.org or 202-587-4967).

Sincerely,

Achieve Atlanta
Advance CTE
Alloy Engineering

Angela Bell
Aspen Institute College Excellence Program
Association for Career and Technical Education
Board of Regents State of Iowa
California Competes
Campaign for College Opportunity
Chiefs for Change
College Now Greater Cleveland
Complete College America
Corporation for a Skilled Workforce
Education Commission of the States
Education Reform Now Advocacy
Finger Lakes Advanced Manufacturers Enterprise
Future of Privacy Forum
Institute for Higher Education Policy
Jobs for the Future
Julie Eklund
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Massachusetts Department of Higher Education
NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
National Skills Coalition
Nexus Research and Policy Center
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South Asian Fund for Education, Scholarship and Training
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