Senator Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Committee
Washington, D.C.

Senator Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Committee
Washington, D.C.

July 26, 2021

Re: Proposal to Reauthorize the Education Sciences Reform Act

Dear Chairman Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback about potential reforms for the reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA). As we have witnessed over the past year, in particular, there is a great need for all levels of government to collect, manage, use, and protect data about important issues the country and the American people face. While there are a great many strengths of our country's educational infrastructure, the data infrastructure applied to improving learning and the workforce continues to face substantial gaps.

The Data Coalition is an membership-based initiative of the non-profit Data Foundation, which specifically advocates for government data to be high-quality, accessible, and useful. The Data Coalition proposes that the federal government provide significant and sustained funding for the Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) in the reauthorization of tESRA. This recommendation is one way to ensure there is timely, useful data about our learners and workers, which can be used for administrative improvements as well as building evidence to improve the entire system over time. We encourage that resources include research grants funded by the federal government, available to address important issues in education policy and student achievement. Building on the past successes of SLDS, renewed investment and attention to this infrastructure will increase accessibility and usability of reliable educational data, furthering the policy agendas advanced in Congress such as the Strengthening Education through Research Act (H.R. 4366) and the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-279).

SLDS is a critical part of our national data infrastructure, tying together education and workforce data. SLDS provides important research opportunities, producing key insights into long term educational outcomes by breaking down silos that traditionally exist in educational and workforce data. States have been able to put this data to work to better support students on pathways to the workforce. Currently, every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico has an SLDS that connects data between some data systems, but few can connect early education, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce. This makes it challenging to study and evaluate programs intended to improve outcomes in college and the workforce. As states and federal programs strive to boost education attainment and close the skill gaps in the workforce, it is vital that our country has the ability to produce rigorous analyses based on high-quality data.

New, sustained investment in SLDS data can provide the important information to answer the critical questions policymakers, educators, as well as parents and students. This will require a significant, multi-year investment of $1 billion. This funding should focus on modernizing SLDS data systems to build more interoperable and accessible data platforms with privacy-preserving technology as well as building capacity to use SLDS data through state research-practice partnerships that bring both real-time learning and longitudinal data, as well as diversify representation of practitioners. Finally, funding should be directed to ensuring robust governance and accountability structures are put into place to ensure these systems transparently address the real priorities, needs and community expectations.

Not only is this funding necessary to improve the data infrastructure to meet the needs of learners and workers, it is necessary to make this a sustained funding level, so that these systems have the resources to evolve to meet ever changing research needs and privacy protection. The importance of this system is discussed at greater length in the attached document.

The Data Coalition also encourages Congress to explore opportunities for new, innovative data collections that can fill gaps of knowledge. For example, the SChool Pulse Survey launched by the Institutes for Education Sciences presents an opportunity to rapidly gain insights from schools about learning loss, that can inform policy design and implementation. Congress should explore similar mechanisms and consider continuing the School Pulse Survey as a resource for researchers, policymakers, parents, and school administrators in coming years.

Thank you for your care and attention to the ESRA reauthorization, and for the opportunity to provide you with comments on behalf of the Data Coalition Initiative members. Please feel free to contact me at corinna.turbes@datafoundation.org with any questions about these comments or to further discuss potential data or evidence reforms for the ESRA reauthorization.

Sincerely,

Corinna Turbes
Policy Director, Data Foundation

ATTACHMENTS:
Garg, K., Guidera, A., & Hart, N. (2021). *Improving Data Infrastructure to Meet Student and Learner Information Needs*. Washington, D.C.: Day One Project