



April 10, 2024

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

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

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

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

Dear Senators Murray, Collins, Baldwin, and Capito,

We are writing to urge you to provide at least **\$100 million for the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS)** and **\$40 million for the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant programs** for fiscal year 2025 accompanied by increased staffing capacity so that both programs can effectively operate and disburse funds to grantees. In addition, we request that you include language emphasizing the rationale for increases to both programs:

[SLDS and WDQI] Funds play an essential role assisting states with the design, development, implementation, and use of longitudinal data systems. The proposed increase would support states' ongoing transition toward efficient and effective integrated data systems from early education to workforce that are designed to provide more useful and actionable information for decisionmakers at all levels, including students, families, school leaders, policymakers, and employers.

Data systems are an indispensable tool for making informed decisions about priorities within communities and existing state data systems are ill-equipped to address the complex and intertwined challenges that have emerged as a result of a multi-year pandemic. States need federal support to evolve their data systems so that they are oriented toward access and support responsive policymaking. 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 other stakeholders responsible for improving data collection and use. Since their creation, the SLDS and WDQI grant programs have helped states establish longitudinal data systems that provide families, students, educators, workforce leaders, and other officials with better, timelier data while protecting that data. These data systems help policymakers and practitioners answer questions about program outcomes and make key information transparent to families, students, and the public. They are also valuable in advancing work on transparency through the use of linked and interoperable data. And, they 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 needs. For example, according to a Data Quality Campaign (DQC) analysis of the most recent National Center for Education Statistics SLDS survey data, although over 90 percent of states reported collecting data across multiple agencies, only 13 states reported the ability to link their data systems from early childhood all the way through to workforce.¹

States and localities need federal support to update critical data infrastructure so that their infrastructure 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:

- Assisting parents in enrolling their children in early learning programs to boost kindergarten readiness rates and enable parents to return to work;
- Connecting students and families to wrap-around services designed to accelerate learning loss exacerbated by the pandemic;
- Auto-admitting eligible high school students into college to reverse major postsecondary enrollment declines;
- Providing 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; and
- Identifying 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.

Modernizing state data systems to meet these needs requires robust data governance, privacy, and security. The Senate HELP Committee’s recent reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act included a robust new SLDS grant program that would help states adopt these components and modernize their systems in a manner that could better support students and their families. Similarly, the House Education and Workforce Committee’s recent reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act included a robust new WDQI grant program.

Achieving the goals identified in these reauthorizations will require a new investments of at least \$100 million for the SLDS grant program and \$40 million for the WDQI grant program, accompanied by staffing increases sufficient to operate the program at full capacity. Such investments will enable planning for the next evolution of state data systems; support updates to data system technology; build stronger data linkages between early learning, elementary and secondary, and postsecondary education, workforce, health, and other data systems; support the human capacity needed to use and manage the information effectively and securely; publish better quality data about individual performance along the education-to-workforce pipeline; and support the creation of research-practice partnerships. Investing in data infrastructure will, most importantly, provide state and local leaders the ability to better serve their communities.

¹ 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>

We would be pleased to talk with you or your staff in more detail about this request. DQC's Vice President of Federal Policy, Kate Tromble, kate@dataqualitycampaign.org would be happy to facilitate a conversation.

Sincerely,

AdvanceCTE
Aligned Impact Muscatine County
All4Ed
Alliance for Learning Innovation
America Forward
Children First/Park Partnership for Success
Credential Engine
Data Foundation
Data Quality Campaign
Education Partnerships Coalition
Greater Milwaukee Foundation
Institute for Higher Education Policy
Jobs for the Future
Knowledge Alliance
Milwaukee Succeeds
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of Workforce Boards
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Council on Teacher Quality
National Skills Coalition
New America Higher Education Program
Results for America
RiseUp Red Wing
State Higher Education Executive Officers Association
StriveTogether
The Education Trust
Third Way
Toledo Tomorrow
UnidosUS
United Way of Central Minnesota
United Way of the Blue Mountains
Waterbury Bridge to Success Community Partnership