February 13, 2026

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Chair, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cassidy,

The Alliance for Learning Innovation (ALI) brings together more than 130 education nonprofits, philanthropy, and the private sector to advocate for building a better research and development (R&D) infrastructure in education. ALI calls for increased capacity of education R&D and supports evidence-based innovation that centers students and practitioners, improves talent pathways, and expands the workforce needed in a globally competitive world.

ALI believes that federal leadership in data collection, governance, and funding is essential to helping states implement effective growth measures and build data systems for continued improvement. These systems can allow best practices to be shared and scaled, improving academic outcomes and expanding opportunity nationwide while enabling families to make informed decisions on behalf of their students. Without consistent data for all students, it becomes impossible to clearly understand how students are doing, where gaps persist, or whether federal programs, policies, and investments are delivering results.

Measuring student growth is important, particularly for understanding progress over time and recognizing effective instruction, but growth alone cannot be the endpoint. The ultimate goal of our education system must remain getting more students prepared for future learning and work. A strong, modernized Institute of Education Sciences (IES) will be essential to building credible evidence about what works in education and ensuring that federal research and evaluation efforts meaningfully inform policy and practice. With that goal in mind, we look forward to reviewing the forthcoming report from IES and its recommendations for redesign.

ALI advances education R&D across state, local, and federal levels to create the conditions for research that unlocks important solutions in education. **Objective, statewide data is critical to this mission, allowing for both federal and state stakeholders to understand what works in education.** The following recommendations for federal support of states implementing or revising growth measures and indicators of school quality in their communities are anchored in ALI's assertion that **data** should be the core

driver of decision-making in education and innovation across all levels of government. Our response focuses on the questions most relevant to our expertise.

2. Are there any kinds of federal support that would be useful to states seeking to implement new growth measures or revise existing ones?

A majority of states already have their own set of growth measures established to calculate student outcomes over time, supported by their longitudinal data systems. **Continued federal investment (at least $28.5M, the current funding level) in Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) is essential** to support states in sustaining their growth measures by ensuring capacity, supporting quality data infrastructure, and facilitating continuous improvement based on sound data insights. While states need to be able to sustain their data infrastructure to further their education and workforce goals, upgrading or modernizing technology and data systems on a large scale often requires an infusion of funding. Additional federal investment, including a one-time infusion of funds, beyond the current SLDS funding, would help build this infrastructure and solidify the federal government as a complementary partner in this work. Efforts like the Workforce Data Quality Initiative have allowed states to make critical investments in their infrastructure, and should continue to be appropriately funded by Congress.

Modernizing SLDS is a recommendation in ALI's State Policy Ed R&D Playbook, a resource advising state leaders on how to embed innovation in their systems, goals, and operations to promote evidence-based responses to education challenges faced by their communities. This recommendation is based on success stories in states where longitudinal and interoperable data systems are enabling the cross-sector linkage of data covering multiple sectors of interest to state education leaders. For example, Washington's Education Research & Data Center (ERDC) gathers information from early childhood through the workforce to comprehensively answer questions about learning and opportunity in the state. Funded through a mix of federal and state investments, ERDC has strengthened transparency with public dashboards, data dictionaries, and a dedicated privacy officer. Alabama also leveraged federal and state funding streams to modernize their Alabama Terminal on Linking and Analyzing Statistics (ATLAS) system, aligning college and career programs with data insights and strengthening workforce pathways in their state.

Federal leadership in maintaining data quality, governance, privacy, and security will help states implement growth measures responsibly and mitigate challenges of statistical complexity. For example, expanded technical assistance through Privacy Technical Assistance Centers and federal funding through agencies such as IES and the National Science Foundation (NSF) supporting partnerships with researchers in designing, testing, and refining growth measures with the expertise in data integrations. Further, **research–practice partnerships (RPPs)** play an important role in ensuring that new data measures

are responsive to local needs, aligned with existing systems, and carefully implemented. In many states, growth measures were developed by third-party organizations. Through mutually beneficial collaborations focused on real problems of practice, RPPs have been proven to meaningfully influence instructional practice and decision-making among state and local education leaders.

In sum, federal support for states engaged in the complex work of integrating growth measures can ensure comparability of data across U.S. states and help synthesize and scale lessons from schools demonstrating both successful measurement practices and promising gains in academic achievement.

3. Are there design changes to state assessment systems that would support the creation of higher-quality growth measures, and are there any federal policies standing in the way of such innovation?

As students' educational pathways become more nonlinear and learning occurs across classrooms, communities, and careers, research is converging on a broader vision of what matters; this is evident in survey data demonstrating the high value that parents are placing on career-connected learning opportunities for their students.

Durable, human skills such as critical thinking, communication, and adaptability will be important skill sets for students to have as they navigate a rapidly evolving workforce in their futures. For example, state-led Portrait of a Graduate profiles and innovative work from organizations like the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and ETS point toward assessment approaches that capture these competencies. These assessments are grounded in measurement science, capable of recognizing learning across multiple pathways, and are designed to deliver continuous, actionable insights for learners, educators, and state education leaders.

4. What have states learned about how best to communicate information about school-average growth to families, such as through school report cards?, and 5. How can the federal government support cross-state learning about communicating information to families?

As noted previously, federal investments in state longitudinal data systems and modern data dissemination tools can strengthen cross-state learning by supporting the sustainability of high-quality data infrastructures that ensure consistency and accuracy in data collection. In addition, The Nation's Report Card (NAEP) is regarded for its rigor and ability to provide meaningful, comparative insights into the academic performance of students in all US states and territories. Findings from NAEP help identify bright spots and learning opportunities that other states can emulate, with the "Mississippi Miracle" serving

as a prominent example inspiring cross-state learning on literacy gains. By prioritizing and funding critical data functions, the federal government can reinforce a coherent national evidence base that enables states to learn from one another, replicate effective practices, and make more informed decisions to improve student outcomes nationwide.

Effective innovation also depends on ensuring that evidence is not only generated, but that findings are also disseminated to state education agencies, districts, educators, and families. In the context of growth measures, the principles of knowledge mobilization center on translating research into clear, accessible, and culturally responsive information about school quality that teachers and families can understand and use to make decisions for their students. For example, Congress could direct the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to publish data required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), such as per-student spending and school-level testing results, while specifying clear timelines for states to submit this information. Although currently a challenge for many states, timely reporting would enable useful comparisons across states and districts, inform families' school choices, and provide consistently accessible insights into student outcomes.

Further, efforts like the National Reading Panel demonstrate the value of concerted efforts to review results of investments from NSF, National Institutes of Health (NIH), and philanthropy; make sense of the current evidence base; and publish the current state of evidence on a particular topic that is accessible, digestible, and actionable by the field. In partnership with the NIH, NSF, and other research agencies, IES can replicate this effort in other areas of research, such as growth measures, assessments, and effective communication with families to empower informed decision-making.

7. What changes to the National Assessment of Educational Progress or other federal data collection efforts would support a national focus on student growth?

The federal government should continue to invest in NAEP as a source of national benchmarks and critical contextual data, and ALI applauds the plans by IES to improve the administration and capacity of NAEP in 2026. NAEP results provide essential, objective insights into how students are performing in core subjects, highlighting both the academic losses experienced during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and notable gains and bright spots. For example, progress observed in states such as Alabama and Louisiana should be examined and scaled to support student learning nationwide.

Long-Term Trend (LTT) assessments from NAEP have tracked student achievement since the 1970s and provide a valuable lens on long-term changes in learning. For instance, the 2022 LTT results for 9-year-olds offered preliminary, national insights into the impacts of the pandemic on student learning. Continued administration of LTT assessments is critical

for understanding trends in math and literacy nationwide and for complementing statewide assessments as a key tool for monitoring student outcomes over time.

Finally, Congress currently requires NAEP mathematics and reading results to be reported every two years; however, there is a broadening consensus among education stakeholders that NAEP should be administered annually. Annual administration would better support states in meeting data requirements necessary for measuring academic growth and responding more quickly to emerging trends. However, to ensure federal agencies can remain responsive to state needs, staffing levels and program investments must be adequately funded and protected. Sustaining and expanding NAEP's scope, frequency, and staffing is essential, as any reductions would limit stakeholders' ability to obtain timely and reliable insights into the condition of the nation's education system. Additionally, embedding NAEP items into statewide assessments can add consistency in data collection and support states and making sure they are tracking meaningful information on student achievement and progress.