



# A “Blueprint in Action” Memo:

*Empowering State & Local Innovation and Improvement Knowledge Mobilization to Improve Student Outcomes*



**Alliance For  
Learning  
Innovation**

## About the “Blueprint in Action” Series

This memo is a part of an implementation series diving deeper into the recommendations outlined in the [Blueprint for the Future of the Federal Role in K-12 Education Research and Development](#) (R&D). Developed in collaboration with InnovateEDU, the LSLN Network, and a [task force](#) of over 150 stakeholders in the field, the blueprint and corresponding [report](#) respond to federal changes impacting education R&D. The task force asserts that the federal government should play a significant role in supporting education R&D by:

- **Investing in research & innovation:** Funding high-potential, high-impact R&D, and supporting the development and scaling of educational tools and approaches.
- **Empowering state and local innovation and improvement:** Partnering with state and local leaders to implement evidence-based solutions that improve student outcomes.
- **Collecting and measuring what matters:** Gathering and publishing high-quality data on the state of education and effective improvement strategies.

## Introduction

Knowledge mobilization is a deliberate and structured process of producing and applying research findings to address real-world challenges. It involves collaboration among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other key individuals to create, synthesize, and use evidence-based knowledge for problem solving. By bridging the gap between research, practice, and policy, knowledge mobilization facilitates innovation and improves decision-making.

This memo on knowledge mobilization supports the second function outlined in the blueprint: “Empower State and Local Leaders to Innovate and Improve.” For meaningful innovation to occur, education stakeholders, including district leaders and practitioners, must understand what works in their unique contexts and be equipped to apply evidence-based practices that improve outcomes in teaching and learning. This memo offers actionable recommendations for federal and state policymakers to strengthen knowledge mobilization— that is, to improve how research and evidence move to and are used by teachers and education leaders— ensuring that existing knowledge effectively informs practice and drives educational improvement.

## Challenge and Opportunity

Despite decades of education research, a troubling disconnect persists between evidence generation and classroom implementation. Practitioners receive insufficient training and preparation for applying research evidence, creating a significant knowledge gap between researchers and the policymakers, districts, schools, and teachers who need this information to improve educational outcomes. Even when existing bodies of research clearly point to

specific types of approaches or interventions as more effective within particular conditions, the evidence is often shared too slowly to be applied widely across schools and classrooms. For example, despite years developing a robust body of evidence around the science of reading, a popular [podcast series](#) was a crucial part of galvanizing parents and policymakers to apply those research findings.

The [Alliance for Learning Innovation \(ALI\)](#) recognized the critical need for improved knowledge mobilization in education and formed a dedicated **Knowledge Mobilization & Engagement Task Force**. This diverse group of stakeholders collaborated through a series of focused meetings to develop practical and actionable policy recommendations for enhancing how education research is produced, shared, and implemented across the educational ecosystem.

The Task Force identified the significant **barriers** that impede knowledge flow between researchers and practitioners, highlighting the urgent need for systematic knowledge mobilization to transform how educational insights are shared, accessed, and applied in real-world settings:

- **Practitioner Exclusion:** Practitioners are rarely included in the design and interpretation of research, as opportunities for research co-creation with teachers, school leaders, and district leaders are limited.
- **Unverified Claims:** Many providers of edtech products, curriculum, and new tools assert that they are “evidence-based” or “research-backed” with little scrutiny.
- **Insufficient Use of New Technologies:** Rapid improvements in technology, including AI, could be used to fuller potential to develop new tools and resources that align to the existing knowledge base and that could generate significant gains in student performance.
- **Informal Knowledge Brokerage Infrastructure:** Persistent disconnects between researchers, policymakers, and educators hinder the implementation of evidence-based innovations in education. Knowledge brokers are needed to serve as essential intermediaries, synthesizing research findings into accessible formats, and facilitating the exchange of knowledge among key stakeholders. For example, [Medical Science Liaisons \(MSLs\)](#) perform a comparable role in healthcare by translating complex research into practical insights and fostering communication among researchers, clinicians, and policy-makers. Education's knowledge brokerage infrastructure remains largely informal in comparison, limiting systematic improvement and innovation across the field.

## Plan of Action

The task force reached a unanimous conclusion: **knowledge mobilization must become**

**central to federal and state education programs, state-level approaches with local education agencies (LEAs), and research funding and implementation processes.** This shared vision emphasizes creating clear pathways between research institutions and classrooms, where evidence flows seamlessly to practitioners while educators' contextual expertise informs research priorities. To maximize impact on student learning, federal agencies must leverage existing evidence more effectively while strategically conducting new research that addresses critical knowledge gaps across the entire educational system.

**The Knowledge Mobilization & Engagement Task Force developed recommendations for the federal government that directly address the barriers outlined above, and are designed to be applicable given the shifting federal education landscape.** The Task Force also identified action steps for state and local agencies given their dominant role in preK-12 education.

### **Recommendation #1: Prioritize Knowledge Mobilization**

Knowledge mobilization strategies and evaluation should be embedded across all education R&D grants to ensure research is more effectively applied in practice. This integration can help shape future R&D structures toward the use of evidence in decision-making and, ultimately, improve student outcomes.

- **Draw on existing research studies and infrastructure related to knowledge mobilization**, such as work produced by Institute of Education Sciences, (IES) and U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) to promote the use of evidence before requiring major investments in new studies. Focus on identifying and reinforcing conditions that already support effective evidence use within current federal and state systems.
- **Equip Program Officers at federal agencies with accessible training and practical tools grounded in knowledge mobilization principles**, enabling them to integrate these approaches into existing grant programs. This can help State Education Agencies (SEAs) prioritize knowledge sharing and brokering within current structures and budgets, without requiring new funding streams. In parallel, strengthen coaching and implementation support for state, district, and school leaders to ensure those closest to the ground are empowered to identify, adopt, and scale evidence-informed practices that improve student outcomes.
- **Develop clear metrics for knowledge mobilization** to track progress and impact and allow for continuous improvement and dissemination of effective knowledge mobilization strategies.
- **Showcase innovative approaches, provide opportunities to highlight innovation, and allow for shared learning and networking, in the service of evidence-based approaches.** An example of this are evidence-focused network-improvement

communities or practitioner networks among Local Education Agencies (LEAs), such as the [Indiana Resource Network](#). These networks are focused on building relationships among LEAs to encourage knowledge-sharing and support for districts in prioritizing research and use of evidence.

### **Recommendation #2: Focus on Impact in Research Design**

Plans for early stakeholder involvement and knowledge mobilization should be required in all research funding proposals to ensure the research directly addresses high-priority needs of communities, educators, and families. All research projects should include clear and actionable plans for how research findings will be used to improve practice and their relationship to existing research and bodies of evidence, and how the research will be translated to the classroom to support students and teachers.

- **Develop federal interagency working groups** with education-related bodies of work to ensure grantmaking is responsive to state and local needs and includes knowledge mobilization provisions. One key question would be, “To what extent do grantees engage in work that leverages knowledge mobilization strategies?” This group could develop recommendations for grant requirements, including knowledge mobilization strategies as part of research funding to ensure that use of research findings, and stakeholder engagement, are considered at the start of research processes. Participation incentives, communication plans, and co-design approaches should be encouraged in research designs.
- **Direct the program office with education grants to develop a plan for programs that includes knowledge mobilization strategies in grant applications.** This approach would model itself on the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018, which encouraged not only the generation of data, but also informed use of data to make evidence-based decisions within federal agencies.

### **Recommendation #3: Expand the use of State Data Systems and AI**

By embedding AI technologies and automation through the [Living Evidence](#) framework and strengthening longitudinal data systems, organizations like IES can respond more effectively to the dynamic needs of educators and decision-makers, and ensure that the best available evidence informs practice in real time.

- **Strengthen and increase funding for the State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant program** at IES to foster evidence-based decision-making. When data sources are up-to-date, complete, and sufficiently resourced and designed, they serve as crucial resources informing key decisions and priorities for school systems and communities.

- **Promote responsible AI** in support of responsible and secure approaches to leveraging AI technologies for enhanced analytic capacity, cybersecurity, and data privacy by ensuring that SLDS funds can be used effectively.
- **Utilize modern technology, systems, and AI to transform how research reaches practitioners by improving dissemination tools** and addressing persistent challenges in accessing and using the existing research corpus. This transformation should focus on enhancing discoverability and actionability of findings, making it easier for educators and decision-makers to apply evidence in practice. Key steps include: updating research databases with [Common Education Data Standards \(CEDS\)](#)-aligned metatagging schema, requiring metatags for future research submissions, and organizing data infrastructure to ensure knowledge is more accessible and usable. Additionally, developing an AI-powered search function that provides clear responses and direct citations to research queries will add helpful functionality and further support practitioners in identifying interventions aligned with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Tiers of Evidence.
- **Leverage the [Living Evidence](#) approach to ensure that research on high-priority, emerging topics in teaching and learning is continuously updated, synthesized, and accessible.** Automation and AI can streamline evidence review, efficiently identifying relevant studies and improving over time in both speed and accuracy, and also support the search and sorting of [grey literature](#) to broaden the scope of accessible evidence. The strategic use of these tools addresses several key challenges such as the increasing demand for timely and relevant practice recommendations, the growing volume and variety of educational research, and the limitations of existing systems to keep pace with emerging findings.

#### **Recommendation #4: Build State & Local Capacity and Incentivize Collaboration**

The current Administration prioritizes greater local control in education, with states serving as important actors in improving knowledge mobilization. Federal action should be responsive to local determination of what will be most valuable based on the specific needs and circumstances of states and districts. Coordinate federal support for education with state and local education agencies in developing and implementing evidence-informed solutions for high-priority issues. The following recommendations can address state and local education agencies' unique and valuable role in this work.

- **Focus on knowledge mobilization for re-competes:** As the federal government potentially considers re-competing contracts for technical assistance providers, regional research labs, and centers, include provisions related to use of best practices in knowledge mobilization.
- **Support research-practice partnerships** to help local education agencies conduct relevant research that will inform practice. Examples of state-level research-practice partnerships include the [DC Education Research Collaborative](#), [Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative](#), [North Carolina Summer Learning Programs](#),

[Tennessee Education Research Alliance](#), and [Georgia Policy Labs](#).

- **Identify, develop, and build knowledge repositories** of accessible PreK-12 education research to ensure existing knowledge can be shared. Examples include:
  - A chatbot developed by [The Learning Agency](#) that makes [Doing What Works Library](#) content more accessible.
  - The [Evidence Advocacy Center](#), which serves as a repository to connect states, districts, schools, higher education institutions, and parents with evidence-based resources and implementation guides.
- **Encourage SEAs and LEAs to leverage federal technical assistance services** to expand their research capacity and support evaluation and evidence implementation. This includes **elevating the role of SEA research directors** and key senior leaders in the prioritization of research and evidence to inform policymaking and decisionmaking.
- **Facilitate cross-agency data governance** to formalize knowledge mobilization activities.

## Conclusion

Prioritizing knowledge mobilization creates a multiplier effect, where every investment in education becomes more powerful by drawing on existing research. In turn, this effect produces new policies and programs that are studied, evaluated, and added to the body of research and evidence. We can develop a path to prosperity through a strengthened education system that incorporates knowledge mobilization as a key component of operationalizing what works in education.

## Appendix: Task Force Overview and Roster

Readers interested in providing feedback on the ideas laid out in this brief, following the work ahead, or sharing aligned work you are already engaged in, can reach out to the ALI team at [contact@alicoalition.org](mailto:contact@alicoalition.org). We are grateful to the Task Force members for sharing their time, expertise, and insights to inform this report through their contributions of examples and real-world experience with this topic. There are many people and organizations who have been focused on translation of evidence and research into practice in the U.S. and around the globe. They have often dedicated their own research efforts to understanding what does and doesn't make it into the classroom or other educational settings, and we are thankful to build upon their tremendous efforts.

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