



American Economic Association
Committee on Economic Statistics and Committee on Government Relations

Linda McMahon, Secretary
Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. We are writing on behalf of the American Economic Association's Committee on Government Relations and Committee on Economic Statistics to highlight the critical role that **federal education data** play in helping to improve the condition of education across the United States, which is in turn essential for building a dynamic, well-prepared U.S. workforce with skills that match the needs of an advanced industrial economy.

Since 1870, the federal government has collected education data across all U.S. states and territories. These data are even more important today. Parents need access to information on the quality of the education available to their children at different schools they could attend, whether public, private, or charter. State and local policymakers benefit from being able to compare resources and student achievement at their schools with those of other schools, which helps them identify successful education policies adopted in other states and find ways to effectively improve their own. The availability of timely, relevant, nationally comparable data on higher-education options is especially important for students and their families trying to choose institutions that will prepare students for successful work lives and arrange affordable financing.

In view of the high value of education data, we are concerned that the ongoing restructuring of the Department of Education's activities may substantially reduce the scope of federal education data available to the public. We believe that whatever restructuring takes place should ensure that efficient and effective ways are found to continue collection of key education data that have been the responsibility of the National Center for Education Statistics. Key areas of data collection include:

- *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)* – the only nationally representative, ongoing assessment of student learning that regularly measures 4th and 8th graders' progress in reading and math.
- *Common Core of Data* – a comprehensive, regularly updated database on all 100,000 public primary and secondary schools in the United States, which provides data on enrollments, funding, staffing, and student achievement for each school and school district.

- *National Teacher and Principal Survey* – the only nationally representative survey of primary and secondary teachers and principals in the United States, which tracks changes in the teaching workforce (educational backgrounds, credentials, years teaching, years at the current school) and working conditions (class sizes, hours, salaries, perceived school problems).
- *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* – a comprehensive, regularly updated database on all colleges, universities, and technical and vocational schools that participate in federal student financial aid programs, which provides data on enrollments, graduation rates, faculty and staff levels, institutional revenues, and financial aid. IPEDS also collects key data for the *College Scorecard*, which students and their families value highly when making decisions about higher education, so that discontinuing IPEDS would impair the Scorecard data.
- *National Postsecondary Aid Survey (NPSAS)* – a periodic nationally representative study of students attending all types of post-secondary institutions, which combines survey and administrative data to accurately characterize how students finance higher education. NPSAS also forms the backbone of other surveys, including *Beginning Postsecondary Students* and *Baccalaureate and Beyond*, which provide key evidence on outcomes of public investments in higher education and the ability of student borrowers to successfully repay their loans.

In addition, the Department of Education has provided grant support to build and expand *State Longitudinal Data Systems*, which help states compile their education data so that it can be used by state-, district-, and school-level decision-makers and teachers to make data-driven decisions to improve student learning.

Many studies have relied on these data sources to provide essential insights for program administrators, policymakers, and families. For example, one study found substantial shifts in enrollment in smaller public colleges and universities towards larger state flagship universities, pushing state policymakers to shift funds away from the smaller schools towards the flagship schools to better reflect changing student demand. Another study, using data from the state longitudinal data system, evaluated an innovative online job training program in Kentucky and found that online training is at least as effective as in-person training but is substantially less costly. In addition, multiple studies using NAEP data have documented the large decline in elementary school students' math and reading proficiency after COVID, with the largest decline in districts where schools were closed for longer—pushing school administrators to recognize the importance of in-person learning for K-12 students. None of these insights would have been possible without federal collection of education data.

The availability of timely, accurate, comparable data on schools at all levels across the United States—and their value for improving education policies and programs—make continued federal collection of education data essential for achieving real improvements in the quality of the education that American students receive. In your role leading the Department of Education through major changes, we urge you to recognize the indispensable value of federal education statistics and to protect continued collection of education data, so that decision-makers at every level have access to the data needed to advance student success, economic growth, and national competitiveness.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further.

March 17, 2025

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenneth R. Troske". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Kenneth Troske, PhD
Chair, AEA Committee on Government Relations – on behalf of the committee
University of Kentucky
ktroske@uky.edu

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Dynan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Karen Dynan, PhD
Chair, AEA Committee on Economic Statistics – on behalf of the committee
Harvard University
kdynan@fas.harvard.edu