

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 4, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to appropriate \$700 million for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

IES is a semi-independent and nonpartisan agency of the U.S. Department of Education and plays a critical role in developing the research base for and evaluating the effectiveness of the nation's education programs. IES helps make sure that taxpayers' money is being invested in efforts that are supported by rigorous research and demonstrated results. Local, state, and federal governments invest billions of dollars on public education each year, and policymakers at all levels depend on IES- supported evidence to inform the best decisions for these dollars.

Congress has demonstrated an increasing appreciation and commitment to the importance of innovation, evidence, and evaluation when determining how to best spend Federal dollars, especially in education. Even with the increases to programs within the IES budget in FY 2020, overall, IES has not recovered from the severe cuts to funding due to sequestration.

With these funding constraints, the ability of IES to foster new and innovative ideas to drive academic achievement in our schools and better instructional practices for our teachers has been severely reduced. This especially harms disadvantaged students by limiting the use of evidence necessary for them to learn and succeed.

IES received an increase in funds in FY2021, but some programs are still operating at funding levels lower than in years past. IES research has produced great results, but it has been highly constrained by limited investment. For example, for every ten applications that IES receives, including those received by National Center for Special Education Research (NCSEER), only one is funded. Similarly, states seeking grants to improve their own administrative data systems have been turned away. This means many pressing questions, including questions regarding school safety, serving non-traditional student populations, and creating affordable pathways for good-paying jobs, remain unanswered.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has experienced severe funding constraints that affect the quality of its surveys, particularly as the agency faces declining survey response rates that prompt additional analyses to make sure that the data accurately describes target populations. Additional investment in the NCES is needed so students and families can better understand institutional outcomes, such as enrollment, completion, and post-college success across programs and majors. This investment would also bring the added benefit of increasing transparency at our higher education institutions. Funding for the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) has not kept pace with the increased costs for the development and administration of tests, leading to the cancelation of scheduled assessments in arts, economics, foreign languages, and geography.

Hardest hit under IES has been NCSEER. Despite a budget that is only two-thirds of what it was in 2005, research funded by NCSEER has resulted in programs that support youth with high functioning autism experiencing high levels of anxiety, individuals with Down syndrome learning to read, and students with learning disabilities studying to master math word problems. NCSEER also provides special educators and administrators research-based resources that support the provision of a free appropriate public education and interventions to foster self-determination in students with disabilities as they transition into adulthood.

The Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) conduct applied research that is directly relevant to state and district administrators, principals and teachers. RELs also make sure that research is shared widely through its deep dissemination networks. Recent work across the REL network has focused on ways to address the teacher shortage; how to increase family involvement in developing foundational reading skills; and the relationship between teacher qualifications and student performance in Algebra I. This work is all driven by the state education agencies and other stakeholders in the regions. With additional resources, the RELs could produce more research-based materials to improve teaching and learning with consideration given to regional context.

Thank you for your attention to our request to appropriate \$700 million for IES in FY 2022. Our education system will be stronger in the future if we provide meaningful, sustained support for rigorous education research and evaluation today.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Cory A. Booker

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Maria Cantwell

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Dick Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Bern Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Mazie Hirono

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator