



**Testimony of Knowledge Alliance  
Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing on “Driving Innovation through Federal  
Investments”**

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April 29, 2014

Knowledge Alliance is pleased to submit testimony to inform the Committee’s efforts to examine how federal investments in research and development are helping spur innovation and improvement across the United States. Knowledge Alliance is a non-profit, non-partisan organization composed of leading education organizations involved in high-quality education research, technical assistance, and evaluation.

Federal funding for education research, evaluation, and technical assistance at the U.S. Department of Education, including the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and other agencies is critical to ensuring that schools are able to adopt teaching and learning advances that will lead to success for their teachers and students.

Educators today are under tremendous pressure to improve academic achievement, and the curricula, instructional programs, and management practices they adopt must produce cost-effective results. However, too often schools do not have access to programs and practices based on scientifically valid research, and do not have effective support to implement those programs in a way that best addresses the specific needs and environment of their individual schools. State and local leaders need better and unbiased information on what really works, access to support systems to help them successfully implement those effective strategies in their own schools, and help in evaluating whether their implementations are meeting expectations. High quality research and technical assistance have the ability to be “game changers” in schools across the nation, but only if the necessary resources and intensified focus is devoted to the endeavor at all levels of the educational system.

*Basic Research*

Research and development programs at federal agencies support the production of quality research on a wide range of education issues that education leaders can use to assess their policies and practices. The research produced by these programs addresses pressing problems of practice faced by schools and teachers, including issues related to special education, English learners, STEM education, adopting education technology, teacher evaluation, assessments, and many others. NSF and the NSF Center for Innovative Research in Cyberlearning in particular play an important part in stimulating the nation’s innovation research agenda, particularly in STEM disciplines across the lifespan, in and out of school. Furthermore, educators can trust that this research is evidence-based. For example, a [recent study](#) funded by the National Center on Education Research (NCER) at IES highlighted 17 practices, programs, and interventions that demonstrably improve reading outcomes for readers of all different ages and skill levels.

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## *Applied Research and Technical Assistance*

There are critical programs in place at multiple federal agencies that assist education leaders by giving them information and technical assistance on how they can best address the needs of their students. The Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) at the IES, for example, support research and data analysis in the field to assess the strength of policies and programs being implemented in schools and classrooms. They help states and districts systematically use data and analyses to improve student outcomes.

In the last REL program cycle, REL West collaborated with a school district in Nevada to analyze student data and identify possible early warning indicators for at-risk students. The district used those patterns and indicators to develop a targeted dropout prevention program, and the district's graduation rate rose from 56 percent to 70 percent during the first two years of the program.

Another regional lab, REL Northwest, conducted a multi-state study on performance on state tests in math and language arts for Native American and Alaska Native students, which allowed the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development to identify areas the state needed to target in order to continue closing the achievement gap, according to Commissioner Mike Hanley.

The Comprehensive Centers at the U.S. Department of Education provide technical assistance to states in developing and implementing evidence-based policies and programs. Comprehensive Centers provide added capacity for states to implement ESEA and the school improvement elements of other federal programs, and to assist their districts and schools in implementation as well.

For example, the North Central Comprehensive Center recently assisted the Nebraska Department of Education in developing a professional development program for teachers focused on developing content knowledge and language skills for English learners. This successful professional development program is being implemented in three other states.

The Southeast Comprehensive Center customized a web-based platform (originally developed by the National Center on Innovation and Improvement) for the Mississippi Department of Education. This platform charts and guides progress for schools with ESEA Title I School Improvement Grants as they engage in improvement efforts to turn around low school performance.

Reliable information on the adoption and implementation of educational technology is a critical need for educational leaders. The Department of Education's Office of Education Technology plays a central role in exploring the power of virtual learning in contributing to educational attainment. We believe that increased support for the programs led by this office is essential to stimulating innovation in education and learning. The national Education Technology Plan and initiatives such as ConnectED are excellent examples of programs that support the design, development and implementation of online assessment systems.

## *Innovation*

The Department of Education and other agencies also support innovation in education, as well as evaluation and dissemination of research and evidence-based practice. Programs such as the Investing in Innovation (i3) fund at the Department of Education have supported the creation, validation, and scaling up of promising education practices. The focus on evidentiary standards and levels of evidence in the i3 program has important applications in other agencies as well, as they consider strengthening the evaluation components of their own contracts and grants. The i3 program prioritizes levels of evidence and innovative approaches to reform, which leads to transformative changes as innovations come to scale and result in better outcomes in areas of persistent problems of practice. One recent i3 award was for the SunBay Digital Math program, which helps teach challenging middle school math concepts by integrating technology, standards-aligned curriculum and teacher professional development in order to boost student learning. The program has shown gains in Florida, Texas, and England, and the i3 grant will allow the curriculum to be validated, and ultimately, upon favorable results of the study, implementing throughout Florida and the nation.

The What Works Clearinghouse at IES assesses, against rigorous evidence criteria, the research supporting programs, practices, and strategies, and makes that information available to the public. And, the studies used in i3 applications often make their way into the What Works Clearinghouse system, expanding the evidence base available to education practitioners.

## *Effects of Sequestration*

While recent programs and investments at the Department of Education and other agencies have increasingly focused on developing and implementing evidence-based practices and providing trustworthy, useable information to education leaders, budget cuts in many education research and technical assistance programs have dramatically limited their work in recent years. Knowledge Alliance urges the Committee to increase the nation's investment in these programs because the evidence is clear: America's educators need more access to high quality research and hands on implementation assistance if our schools are ever going to be able to close achievement gaps and produce the increases in student achievement that the public demands.

In particular, the Regional Educational Laboratories and Comprehensive Centers have seen their funding decline since FY2011 because of the across-the-board rescissions and sequestration. These programs have not been restored to their pre-sequestration funding amount, and the President's budget request for FY 2015 would again flat-fund them at their post-sequester level. The RELs and Comprehensive Centers work hand in hand with states and districts on a daily basis and try to fulfill every request that is made to them. However, resources such as staff and budget are limited, and as a result they are in the position of having to say no to some critical and timely requests from states and districts.

For example, the REL Northeast and Islands received specific requests from states to study how the Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balanced or PARCC assessments align with proficiency-based learning initiatives, the relationship between various technology-based

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systems and student achievement, the profile of students who are participating in career certification courses and the extent to which the certification exams predict career readiness, among others. They were also asked to follow up on a teacher evaluation implementation study in New Hampshire. All of these projects have yet to be addressed due to a lack of resources. Similarly, the Southeast Comprehensive Center has been unable to address specific requests from states such as a request from Alabama for technical assistance and support for piloting an English Learner coaching model in Montgomery Public Schools, and a request from North Carolina for technical assistance and support for developing an English Learner evaluation for their LEAs and schools.

Education leaders at the state and local levels rely on federal investments in education research to help them identify promising evidence-based practices and successfully integrate those practices into their schools. Knowledge Alliance urges the Committee to increase federal support for these vital research investments so that educators continue to have access to these crucial resources.