Auburn University
College of Education

Boston University
Wheelock College of Education and Human Development

Boston College
Lynch School of Education

Florida State University
College of Education

Georgia State University
College of Education & Human Development

Indiana University
School of Education

Iowa State University
College of Human Sciences

John Hopkins University
School of Education

Lehigh University
College of Education

North Carolina State University
College of Education

Oklahoma University
Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education

Penn State University
College of Education

Purdue University
College of Education

Syracuse University
School of Education

Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development

The Ohio State University
College of Education and Human Ecology

University of Arizona
School of Education

University of California – Santa Barbara
Gevirtz Graduate School of Education

University of Central Florida
College of Community Innovation and Education

University of Connecticut
Neag School of Education

University of Florida
College of Education

University of Georgia
School of Education

University of Houston
College of Education

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
College of Education

University of Kansas
School of Education

University of Maryland College Park
College of Education

University of Minnesota
College of Education and Human Development

University of Missouri
College of Education

University of Nevada-Reno
College of Education

University of North Carolina
School of Education

University of Oklahoma
College of Education

University of Oregon
College of Education

University of Pittsburgh
School of Education

University of Southern California
Rossier School of Education

University of Texas at Austin
College of Education

University of Vermont
College of Education and Social Services

University of Wisconsin – Madison
School of Education

University of Wyoming
College of Education

Vanderbilt University
Peabody College of Education and Human Development

Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Education

LEARN℠ Learning and Education Academic Research Network
Advancing the Sciences of Teaching and Learning

September 16, 2021

Matthew Soldner
Commissioner
National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences
400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 4160
Washington, DC 20202

RE: Docket ID ED-2021-IES-0118

On behalf of the Learning and Education Academic Research Network (LEARN), the following comments are provided in response to the Request for Information on the U.S. Department of Education (ED) 2022-2026 Learning Agenda published in the Federal Register on August 17, 2021. LEARN, a coalition of 40 leading research colleges of education across the country, advocates for the importance of research on learning and development. Established in 2004, LEARN provides evidence-based information to guide legislators and policy makers in addition to advocating for an increased Federal investment in education research.

While LEARN is very supportive of the proposed Learning Agenda, we strongly encourage ED to include a focus around early childhood education and early interventions. As experts in the field, LEARN members have provided below specific evidence building activities and questions ED should target within the listed focus areas as well as our rationale for the proposed inclusion of a focus area on early education.

Proposed Focus One: Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on students, schools and institutions of higher education, educators and their communities

LEARN supports ED's acknowledgement of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic upon both K-12 and higher education institutions. As a coalition of education researchers, many LEARN members were required to quickly pivot their research and interventions to adapt for a virtual or hybrid learning environment. LEARN encourages ED to continue prioritizing the use of evidence-based research and interventions while evaluating and addressing the impact of COVID-19 on schools and universities nationwide.

Some questions to consider:

- Historically, education research is used to measure long-term impacts: how can ED support the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in prioritizing research priorities that allow for rapid student evaluation and intervention related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Proposed Focus Two: Promoting equity in student access to educational resources, opportunities, and welcoming, safe, and inclusive environments

LEARN strongly supports ED's interest in promoting equity in all aspects of a student's experience. We would like to emphasize the importance of ensuring there is a focus on the education of students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs) in any overall focus on educational equity by ED. These subgroups both experienced unique educational challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ED must be intentional in its efforts to support them and their educational needs. This includes a particular focus on continuing to use research to grow the knowledge base of effective practices for these and other at-risk subgroups.

Additionally, LEARN recommends ED invest in research to further Artificial Intelligence (AI) learning in its equity efforts. While a growing field with respect to education, LEARN member research has found that AI has the potential to provide more personalized, equitable and competency-based educational opportunities for students and teachers. Once properly road tested and proven effective, AI learning has the real possibility of providing an equitable education for all students.

Below are some questions for ED to consider as it looks to further its support of research in the area of education equity, especially as it relates to learning by students with disabilities and ELLs as well as the application of Artificial Intelligence in the context of education:

- Who is diagnosed with a learning disability? When are they diagnosed? What accommodations/services are provided? What works?
- What instructional practices are most effective for ELLs? How are ELLs achieving in academic subjects? What courses are they assigned to take?
- How can AI be used to provide teachers with information about student learning and differentiate instruction?
- How can AI be used to provide students with instruction?

Proposed Focus Three: Meeting student social, emotional, mental health, basic, and academic needs

LEARN appreciates ED's acknowledgement of student social, emotional, mental health, basic and academic needs in learning environments. As ED prioritizes research in this area, a focus on the social, emotional and mental health needs of our students are vital. In order to successfully meet these student needs, ED should account for the radical changes in teaching and learning that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic and invest in researching what does and does not work for different student populations. It is clear that the educational landscape has changed significantly over the past two years and ED should support research in these changes in order to ensure that student needs are met intentionally and effectively.

In addition to these areas, a neglected area of academic study that needs further attention by research is how best to incorporate environmental education into classroom instruction. Schools must prepare students—mentally, emotionally and academically— for the rapidly changing world around them and we believe that evidence-based practices to teach effective environmental education is an important approach.

Below are some questions for ED to consider as it looks to further its support of research in these areas:

- How are K-12 students performing in specific subject areas (english, science, math, social studies)? What factors are associated with student achievement (e.g., teacher quality, school climate, resources, parents, school leaders, policies)?
- How do we leverage technology to build research-based formative assessments of student knowledge that provide information teachers can use to guide instruction?
- How are districts, schools, and teachers selecting and implementing curricula? Which PK-12 curricula work? How do they work and who are they helping?
- What school policies and practices promote students' academic achievement? (e.g., detracking, flexible schedules, discipline procedures)
- How can teachers' instructional strategies be used to support the academic achievement of all students? (e.g., complex instruction, discourse)
- How can environmental education be successfully taught across all grade levels.

Proposed Focus Five: Supporting a well-prepared diverse educator workforce and their professional growth to strengthen student learning

LEARN supports ED's focus on supporting a well-prepared diverse educator workforce. We would like to stress the importance of supporting the entire educator workforce, specifically, educational leaders like

principals, superintendents and presidents. Research continues to be needed to increase our knowledge of how to develop and retain a well-prepared, diverse educator workforce.

Proposed Additional Focus: Early Childhood Education and Interventions

LEARN strongly encourages the inclusion of early childhood education as a focus in ED's 2022-2026 Learning Agenda. LEARN members have and continue to study the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality early childhood education; we believe ED must continue to support research which improves early childhood education, particularly for at-risk subgroups.

Below are some questions for ED to consider as it evaluates what questions to focus research in the early childhood area:

- How can we increase vertical alignment to ensure that early learning gains are sustained longitudinally into elementary school and beyond?
- How can we best measure high-quality early childhood programs?
- How can we scale universal PreK while sustaining the Birth through 3 sector?
- How can we best prepare and support principals to be effective leaders of PreK-3 education?
- Who has access to high-quality early childhood education? What policies work to provide greater and more equitable access?
- What high-leverage teaching practices are effective with young learners?
- How do we prepare, retain, and support a diverse and effective Pre-K teacher workforce?
- How can schools support students' transition from PreK to elementary school?
- How can parents and communities become involved in the education of their young children at home?

With the LEARN coalition consisting of deans of education from around the nation, every member of LEARN conducts research within the unique contexts of their surrounding communities, school districts, families and students. The scope of these research efforts, while varied in size, lead to effective interventions, practices and policies because they acknowledge the nuances of the entire educational ecosystem in which they work. The existence of LEARN, a voice advocating for Federal education research investments, recognizes the importance of the need for ED to think deeply about how its work should drive a larger and robust Learning Agenda. Yet, we remain sensitive to the importance of the State and local contexts we work in and their significance in the creation of effective policy making. We ask that ED keep this State and local mindset as a learning agency across the broad focus areas they have compiled. We hope that our guiding questions and recommendations assist in these efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Alex Nock at 202 495-9497 or anock@pennhillgroup.com.

Respectfully Submitted,

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