

Auburn University College of Education

Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development

Florida State University Anne Spencer Daves College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

Georgia State University College of Education & Human Development

Indiana University School of Education

Iowa State University College of Health and Human Sciences

John Hopkins University School of Education

Lehigh University College of Education

New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

North Carolina State University College of Education

Penn State University College of Education

Purdue University College of Education

Syracuse University School of Education

Teachers College – Columbia University

Texas A&M University College of Education & Human Development

The University of Arizona School of Education

The University of Texas at Austin College of Education

University of Buffalo Graduate School of Education

University of California – Berkeley, Berkeley School of Education

University of California – Santa Barbara, The 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 Houston College of Education

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign College of Education

University of Iowa College of Education

University of Kansas School of Education and Human Sciences

University of Maryland College Park College of Education

University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development

University of Missouri College of Education & Human Development

University of Nevada-Reno College of Education & Human Development

University of Oregon College of Education

University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

University of Pittsburgh School of Education

University of South Florida College of Education

University of Southern California Rossier School of Education

University of Vermont College of Education and Social Services

University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development

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

October 15, 2025

Amber Northern
Senior Advisor, Office of the Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Dr. Northern,
On behalf of the LEARN Coalition, we appreciate the opportunity to respond to the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Request for Information (RFI) on Redesigning the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), as published in the Federal Register on September 25, 2025.

LEARN, a coalition of 41 leading research colleges across the country, advocates for the importance of research on learning and development. As experts in the field, LEARN members provide evidence-based information to guide legislators and policy makers while advocating for an increased Federal investment in education research.

We appreciate that the RFI enumerated IES's core functions, as undertaken by the four centers, and agree with the importance of maintaining these functions. The four centers under IES work hand in hand to ensure key stakeholders – including students, teachers, parents, schools – public, charter, and private – and States – can access the highest quality education research and benefit from this knowledge.

In addition, all of the functions of IES are interdependent on each other in many respects. Education data through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is critical to conducting education research. Evaluations and technical assistance (TA), as carried out by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), are vital to inform program operation and translate research findings to practice. The work of the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE) ensures that our nation's most vulnerable school-aged populations can benefit from high quality education research. Finally, the National Center for Education Research (NCER) supports the research necessary for ensuring students receive instruction backed by rigorous evidence-based practices that is, in turn, used by NCEE to evaluate and provide technical and other assistance to education programs. As LEARN has always advocated for ways to improve IES's functionality and ultimately its impact on learning, we appreciate your effort to conduct "a comprehensive assessment to strengthen [IES's] structure, priorities, and operations" across these interconnected centers.

In the RFI, you identify that a key purpose of this effort is to "increase the speed at which evidence is produced and used." LEARN agrees that there is certainly a need to ensure that research is conducted in an expedited fashion when the nature of the problem being studied deserves such an approach. For example, an emergent situation might require the study of a particular challenge being faced by schools to determine an appropriate remedy that can be implemented in real time. In contrast, there is also the need to conduct longitudinal and other long-term research to be sure that the solutions that research, including fast turnaround research, identifies have the desired lasting impacts. In addition, the speed of a research effort should never undermine rigor and quality in research as education research underlies the evidence needed to provide students and teachers with the best tools to maximize academic success.

Additionally, key to the strong production of evidence-based policy through research is the capacity that research-focused institutions of higher education have to analyze and identify what works in our nation's schools and other education environments. LEARN

members presently work with States and local school districts that are often under resourced and without the capacity to conduct basic and other applied research (e.g., translational, implementation). Without the research undertaken by universities, this work would not be done. This work is both responsive to the identified needs of States as well as honed to ensure that research findings and evidence-based policy can be translated into practice – practice that helps our students learn and our educators teach. Likewise, this work also identifies solutions to problems which States and school districts will encounter in the future – ensuring that we are not just focused on today’s challenges, but those to come. The core functions of IES that the RFI highlights all contribute to the ability for institutions of higher education to provide this State- and local-centric evidence-based policy.

While directly targeting State and local needs, the support that IES provides to train the future generation of researchers is critical. Without this support, the ability to help States and school districts to translate research into practice would wither. This is one of the great strengths of IES-funded efforts that often goes unnoticed or discounted.

The RFI identified several areas for specific input. LEARN provides the following responses below:

Function more cohesively across its four centers to ensure shared goals drive data collection, research funding, and technical assistance.

ED should prioritize nominating and confirming a Director of IES and members of the National Board for Education Sciences (NBES) to bring necessary leadership and direction to IES. As LEARN has seen over many years of working with IES, having a confirmed Director is essential for IES to achieve the goals you have identified and bring the focus and leadership to the Institute that it needs to be most effective. Likewise, having a Board that assists the Director in setting priorities and conducting oversight ensures a much larger, diverse set of stakeholders is able to provide input and direct IES’s work. In order to achieve the Administration’s goals of supporting current State and local education needs, this type of leadership is necessary.

Furthermore, LEARN implores the Department to ensure that staffing at IES is sufficient. The decision to implement staffing cuts through a department-wide Reduction in Force (RIF) earlier this year disproportionately impacted IES, raising serious questions about the future of its core research, evaluation, and data functions—critical resources for educators, policymakers, and State and local leaders. Inadequate staffing to conduct day-to-day operations at IES undermines the ability of the four centers to operate cohesively and at optimal effect.

Better meet the needs of state and local leaders, educators, parents, researchers, and state education agencies.

IES should actively seek input on what State and local stakeholders need. This process begins with confirming a Director and having the new Director publish or recommend priorities for IES to focus on, as required by law. Through the process of developing these priorities, LEARN encourages the Department to seek public input, including by encouraging IES to speak with States and school districts about their needs and actively soliciting State and school district input, as well as through advisory panels, practitioner conferences, research partnerships, and routine checkpoints to assess field needs. University-based research partners and TA providers should be included in this process to ensure all parties are exposed to and benefit from hearing directly from stakeholders.

Improve the timeliness, accuracy, and accessibility of its statistics and research products.

We agree that IES should fund long-term research, as well as research that seeks to quickly identify, assess and generate solutions for emergent issues. During the previous Director’s tenure, there was the beginning of an effort to focus a portion of research dollars for this quick reaction research. In fact, research focused on Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an excellent example of quick turnaround research that is desperately needed with the fast-paced change in this field and its application to education. At the same time, IES needs to be more purposeful in ensuring research findings are accessible to State and local leaders. Furthermore, we agree that rigorous education research is critical, and we appreciate IES’s attention to this.

Maximize the utility of federal and other education program evaluations.

LEARN recommends that IES strengthen partnerships with other Federal agencies and between State agencies to align data collection and reduce redundancy. LEARN saw great value in the work that IES did in partnership with the National Science Foundation to establish several AI institutes that were focused on using AI to improve teaching and learning. This cross-agency collaboration led to both agencies successfully amplifying their resources to produce greater results.

Improve mechanisms for disseminating and scaling evidence-based practices, including the work of the RELs, WWC, and R&D Centers.

Dissemination (or translation to practice) and TA efforts by IES ensure high quality educational research benefits students across the U.S. To best achieve translation to practice and scaling of evidence-based practices, LEARN recommends that IES modernize its peer review, grantmaking, and contracting processes to encourage innovation while maintaining rigor.

Furthermore, we urge IES to restart its review panel process utilized to award grants. The lack of a review panel contractor has halted grantmaking, stopping critical education research to inform evidence-based practices from continuing. We also urge IES to consider conducting two cycles of grantmaking each year to ensure that the very best and brightest researchers spanning diverse viewpoints are informing the education of America's children through rigorous research. When IES holds only one NCER or NCSEER competition a year, researchers can lose school district partners that are necessary to conduct and ensure research is timely and applicable.

Specific Areas of Interest

Prioritize and streamline federal data collections to balance burden and benefit.

LEARN agrees that IES should ensure that Federal data collections are streamlined and prioritized. As Deans of Graduate Schools of Education, LEARN members interact with Federal education data collection processes often. We support efforts to reduce burdens associated with these processes, while maintaining key elements of data collection.

Improve the reach and utility of evidence dissemination.

Dissemination (or translation to practice) of evidence-based practices and research is one of the most important functions of IES. LEARN is eager to work in partnership with you to improve the reach and utility of research. Translation of effective practices needs to be done at scale to truly have systemic impact, often involving commercial publishers of curriculum and other third parties to facilitate wide scale adoption. We urge IES to view the opportunity to improve the reach and utility of research translation as a collaborative effort that should be designed by university-based research partners, States and school districts collaboratively.

Another improvement would be to recognize that different expertise is needed to communicate findings effectively. IES should expand dissemination by investing in communications expertise and experimenting with new platforms such as videos, podcasts, and social media. IES could also consider reorganizing its website around topics and programs, rather than individual awards or researchers.

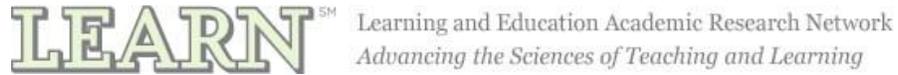
Support states and districts through more responsive technical assistance and capacity building, including building states' capacity for using evidence and creating a culture of continuous improvement.

LEARN members regularly work with stakeholders in their States and neighboring districts. We believe this is an important part of our work and encourage IES to be purposeful in prioritizing this function, as we have, to ensure students benefit from rigorous education research.

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LEARN appreciates the opportunity to respond to this RFI and looks forward to working with the Department as you continue to develop plans to redesign IES.

Sincerely,



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