



AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION
Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics®

732 North Washington Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1943

(703) 684-1221 ■ www.amstat.org ■ asainfo@amstat.org

■ www.facebook.com/AmstatNews ■ www.twitter.com/AmstatNews

December 6, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chair, Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Member, Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy,

We write to express our deep concern that the draft bill from the Senate HELP Committee to reauthorize the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) would undermine the ability of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to produce timely, relevant, objective, and trustworthy statistics when the need is at an all-time high. We are also troubled that the draft bill would impede NCES’s ability to fulfill its responsibilities as required by the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018 and OMB’s proposed regulation to build trust in our nation’s statistical agencies.

The Covid-19 pandemic underscored the critical role played by NCES in providing timely and objective information on the state of education in our nation. However, as highlighted recently in a National Academies’ report and academic work, longstanding bureaucratic hurdles within the Department of Education have hindered NCES's ability to fulfill its mandate expeditiously.^{1,2,3} Unfortunately the draft bill exacerbates those hurdles and is therefore counterproductive to NCES’s timely preparation, publication, and dissemination of objective and relevant statistics. Such data from a trustworthy agency is especially vital now given the current information marketplace; it grounds discussions and informs citizens, a foundation of a democracy.

The American Statistical Association’s request to the committee⁴ in April – for “NCES to be provided with full control over its professional and statistical operations” – renewed here aligns with the OMB proposed [Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units](#) (informally coined

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2021), [Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency: Seventh Edition](#). (C. F. Citro, & B. A. Harris-Kojetin, Eds.) National Academies Press.

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2022), [A Vision and Roadmap for Education Statistics](#). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. DOI: 10.17226/26392.

³ [Bolstering Education Statistics to Serve the Nation](#), *Statistics and Public Policy*, November 17, 2023.

⁴ https://www.amstat.org/docs/default-source/amstat-documents/pol-esra_nces_americanstatisticalassociation.pdf

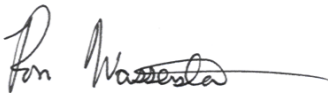
the “Trust Regulation”), which is required by the Evidence Act. Indeed, its stated aim is “to explicate where autonomous decision-making authority is important and why”. The following sentence is especially poignant to our request: “Consistent with well-established principles, such trust can be maintained by ensuring proper authority and autonomy of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units and ensuring that Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units have appropriate and adequate authority in making, or consulting with appropriate officials on, decisions that could impact their ability to uphold their fundamental responsibilities.”

We understand the desire to administratively align NCES with the three other centers in the Institute of Education Sciences. Doing so, however, would be a grave error and would not recognize NCES’ unique role for the Department of Education and the country. NCES’s mission, history, and place in the broader federal statistical system and community set it apart. Unlike the purpose of the other centers — to administer research funding that will advance education policies and practices in the United States — NCES’s mission is to provide relevant, objective, timely information on the state of education in the US. The production of such statistics requires entirely different expertise, operations, and protections. As part of the federal statistical system, NCES must follow guidance and directives from the Office of the Chief Statistician of the US which, among other functions, oversees the production and accessibility of objective, reliable, and timely statistics. The NCES Commissioner is also designated as the statistical official for the Department of Education by the Evidence Act.

We urge the bill be modified in advance of Committee mark-up to provide NCES control of its statistical and professional operations – e.g., publication, budget, contracting, IT, hiring/staffing, data collection and analysis, ability to respond to Congressional inquiry, branding on website/reports, as detailed in our redline – so that it can provide timely, relevant, objective, and trustworthy statistics for our schools, students, families, and country.

In addition to the links and footnotes in this letter, we provide further resources below and stand ready to work with you on this very crucial legislative initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Wasserstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ron Wasserstein
Executive Director

CC: Members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Enclosure: Additional Resources

Additional Resources:

1. [State of the Education Data Infrastructure: What Three Experts Have to Say About the National Center for Education Statistics](#)
2. [What Protects the Autonomy of the Federal Statistical Agencies? An Assessment of the Procedures in Place that Protect the Independence and Objectivity of Official Statistics](#), *Statistics and Public Policy*, March 10, 2023.
3. [American Statistical Association letter to the US Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, April 14, 2023.](#)
4. [American Statistical Association priorities for ESRA reauthorization](#)
5. [National Center for Education Statistics Faces Program Cuts](#)