



First Five Years Fund

August 12, 2014

Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Senator Alexander

I am writing in my capacity as the Executive Director of the First Five Years Fund (FFYF) to recommend that through reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) you update the State Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) program in a way that continues to support unified early childhood data systems.

Since 2007, the federal government and states have partnered to develop unified early childhood data systems. States have used federal funds from multiple sources – the Head Start Act, the Early Learning Challenge, and SLDS grants – to make significant strides toward the kind of linked systems that will provide appropriate and useful information.

Specifically, we wish to support these efforts and echo the recommendations you recently received from a group of state-level leaders and advocates. These recommendations include using the program to support the design, development, and implementation of early childhood data systems, which emphasize the following priorities:

Require strong protections regarding student data privacy, confidentiality and security.
Data should only be collected if it is subject to strong protections regarding privacy and security. If this can be accomplished, then state-level longitudinal data systems will allow for vital information that will help drive high level decision making around funding to classroom decisions that drive student progress.

Support state leadership in building unified early childhood data systems and focus SLDS grants on state-level multi-agency work to build these systems.
The state-level administration of early childhood programs – including child care, preschool, home visiting, and special education – is often spread across multiple agencies. The range of programs amplifies the fact that not one agency can do it alone. The federal government and states have consistently taken a cross-agency approach and reauthorization of ESRA should be updated to reflect such approach. States, with federal support, have been working for many years on the development of their systems and the reauthorization of ESRA should support this ongoing work, including by focusing longitudinal data systems grants (or a portion of those grants) on state-level multi-agency work to build unified early childhood data systems connected to state longitudinal data systems.

The reauthorization of ESRA provides an opportunity to build on the important work in states. Continued and well targeted federal support in this area will help states and localities meet their early

learning goals and ensure the success of ongoing initiatives to promote kindergarten readiness and students' later life success.

Thank you for considering our recommendations. We appreciate your leadership and would be pleased to meet with your staff to further discuss ESRA reauthorization as a component of high quality early learning. Please contact FFYF's National Director, Sarah Rittling at srittling@ffyf.org, should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kris Ruy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kris" and the last name "Ruy" clearly distinguishable.

Executive Director
First Five Years Fund