

## Knowledge Alliance Transition Memo

*This memo outlines the recommendations of Knowledge Alliance (KA) for the incoming Trump Administration as it begins to shape its education policy agenda. To provide context, this memo will begin with an overview of who Knowledge Alliance is, including our mission and objectives, before proceeding to specific recommendations.*

### Who We Are

[Knowledge Alliance](#) (KA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization composed of the leading education groups dedicated to empowering schools, districts and all 50 States with the tools and resources needed to improve learning and outcomes for every student. For districts across the country and for different types of learners and students, KA members partner with States and districts to strengthen their education goals and address their pressing academic issues like literacy and math performance, chronic absenteeism and overall school improvement. KA members' work provides information needed for parents and families to help their students succeed. Over its 50-plus year history, KA and its members have been trusted, objective partners for State, local and Federal policymakers.

### The Opportunity

The next four years provide an incredible opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement and increase students' readiness for well-paying jobs that will cement the U.S.'s standing as the leading global economy for years to come. The Trump Administration is in a unique position to accelerate this economic progress through strong support for programs and policies that empower parents, educators and other decisionmakers to make evidence-based decisions and investments to meet students' individual needs and deliver the best education in the world.

The system that supports evidence-based decisions and improves student achievement is critical and is nimble enough to meet every community where they are. Whether it is getting information to decision makers faster, identifying and scaling evidence-based practices or professional development, or evaluating if an intervention is delivering results, a robust research development and dissemination (RD&D) system is essential to support schools, districts and States in meeting their strategic goals. This system moves knowledge from isolated successes to broader improvement, ensuring that Federal programs translate into better outcomes for teachers and students. Closing the loop between what works in theory and what delivers results in classrooms is not just about producing evidence—it is about delivering it, scaling it and sustaining it.

**Advancing a future where every education dollar drives meaningful outcomes and every student is prepared for success** requires an RD&D system that includes:

- **Timely and relevant data** that provide educators and other leaders with the insights needed to make evidence-based decisions, identify student needs and inform instructional strategies while also protecting student privacy and securing student data.

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- **Relevant, rigorous and applied research** that provides critical insights into region-specific challenges and opportunities to inform strategic decisions and drive meaningful improvement.
- **Development and innovation** that moves research into evidence-based practical products, services and processes that teachers can use to improve student learning and outcomes.
- **Continuous evaluation** to ensure that resources support effective strategies and improve student success and enable families, educators and policymakers to understand what works, for whom and why.
- **Coaching and training** (*e.g. technical assistance*) that helps schools and districts identify, adopt and scale research-backed practices to improve student outcomes.
- **High-quality student assessments** that provide critical feedback to students, teachers and parents, guiding targeted interventions, improving teaching strategies and ensuring accountability.

As the Trump Administration sets its education policy agenda, there is an unparalleled opportunity to address the persistent gap between what we know works for students and what is implemented at scale. KA members excel at moving the needle in this area. Innovation in education does not have to mean creating something new—it can, and should, include increasing students', teachers', and communities' access to programs and practices with a proven track record of effectiveness. The Trump Administration can make sure information is available faster to State and local districts and that our critical and limited resources go towards research-backed practices and programs. Ensuring access to an RD&D system will make that possible—especially for smaller, rural and less resourced States and communities.

This system is a must-have, not a nice to have; without it, districts and States risk pouring resources into investments and policies without knowing if they are making a difference, and they do not have the information they need to make informed decisions. Every dollar spent on these components improves the efficiency and effectiveness of other education investments. Thus, we urge the Administration to maintain and strengthen the following programs:

## **Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) and Comprehensive Centers (CCs)**

The most effective approach to education RD&D empowers schools, districts and States to define their own needs and priorities with access to the expertise and resources essential for achieving their educational goals and addressing their most pressing challenges. A recent [evaluation](#) of a \$1 billion-dollar Federal education program to improve literacy outcomes, where 14 States held internal competitions to award funds in their State, supports the necessity of this collaborative approach. The evaluation found that when technical assistance was involved it resulted in better targeting of funds and was associated with the purchase of evidence-based programs, strategies and instructional practices. Simply put, when RELs and CCs are involved, funds are efficiently spent and there are better outcomes for students.

**Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs):** Driven by a State or district's expressed priorities, the RELs generate research, evidence and tools for States to implement to improve student outcomes. REL work supports consequential local, regional and statewide decisions about education policies, programs and practices.



**Using evidence to improve literacy teaching:** Former Mississippi State Superintendent, [Dr. Carey Wright credits REL Southeast](#) as playing an integral role in helping Mississippi improve its fourth-grade literacy rate from being 49<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> in the nation. Funded by the Federal government, but driven by Mississippi's priorities, the REL created two new tools to evaluate Mississippi's teachers' knowledge. These tools allowed the Mississippi Department of Education to track teachers' engagement with students in the classroom and identify where there was room for improvement. When Dr. Wright went to the State legislature each year, she was able to use data from a [REL Southeast study](#) to demonstrate the program's return on investment and secure additional funds from the legislature.

**Comprehensive Centers (CCs):** CC's provide support to States and districts to improve student outcomes and close achievement gaps. The CCs help States and districts identify, implement and sustain effective evidence-based practices that support improved educator and student outcomes. Each CC's plan is determined by and responsive to the priorities set by the States. Each CC has an advisory board of business leaders, representatives from State educational agencies, school districts, institutions of higher education, policymakers and researchers.

**Improving literacy through coaching and training:** The Idaho State Department of Education sought the services of the Region 17 CC to co-develop the Idaho Reading Coach Academy (the Academy) in order to provide training and support to reading coaches to effectively coach teachers in the science of reading, with a specific focus on K-3 literacy. The Region 17 CC helped to create a coaching playbook, offered direct coaching support to two districts and conducted an evaluation of the initiative. Over 80 percent of participants in the Academy reported that they had increased their knowledge of effective, evidence-based coaching practices and had begun implementing those practices, leading to a sizeable increase in the number of educators who are trained in the science of reading principles.

## Other Key Programs that Constitute a Robust RD&D System

**Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Grants:** EIR grants provide funding to create, develop, implement, replicate, or take to scale entrepreneurial, evidence-based, field-initiated innovations to improve student outcomes. The EIR program consists of three different types of grants (*early, mid-phase and expansion grants*) that allocate increased investments as the level of evidence increases—an efficient and smart investment of Federal funds. In an increasingly globalized world, the U.S. can maintain and improve its competitive standing through investing in programs like EIR that foster and drive innovation in our education system.

**Improving math achievement through innovation:** [ASSISTments](#) received EIR grants and now stands out among education technology tools as a proven solution with lasting impact backed by rigorous evidence of improving math achievement. A study completed in Maine showed that 7<sup>th</sup> grade students using ASSISTments for math homework achieved the equivalent of an extra three-quarters of a year of learning compared to peers who used the same textbooks and curriculum but did not have access to Assistments.

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**Achieving outcomes with a low-cost solution:** A 2023 replication study in North Carolina confirmed these findings. Even a year after students had stopped using ASSISTments, 8<sup>th</sup> graders who used the platform in 7<sup>th</sup> grade outperformed their peers on year-end math tests, showing lasting benefits. The long-term impact of ASSISTments was comparable to the gains from in-person tutoring at 2 percent (\$100/student) of the cost of in-person tutoring. Unlike other popular math practice sites, in which a computer controls the content, ASSISTments keeps the control levers with the teachers, who pick the questions from a library of 200,000.

**Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Research and Development:** The IES research and development opportunities are critical mechanisms for addressing the nation’s most complicated and pressing challenges and is the engine behind educational RD&D. It administers research studying the complexities of education in a variety of settings. IES also studies and evaluates Federal education programs to understand what works and what does not; develops, tests and disseminates new approaches to improve education outcomes; researches high-priority education issues to generate evidence and practical solutions; and helps States design and implement data systems to efficiently, accurately and safely analyze and use education data.

## The Path Forward

Programs like ASSISTments in Maine and the success stories from Mississippi demonstrate that we have the tools to make a significant difference, but scaling and achieving sustained implementation requires strategic investment and the expertise of key partners. Maintaining and strengthening education RD&D ensures that other Federal investments—whether in foundational research or formula funding—directly improve learning and outcomes for students.

**While investments in this system represent only a small fraction of the overall Federal education budget, the return on these investments is what maximizes the impact of every other dollar spent, making them indispensable.** We stand ready to make this vision a reality and advance a future where every education dollar drives meaningful outcomes, and every student is prepared for success.

We at KA look forward to partnering with you to support these efforts and to serve as a resource for you. Our members can offer valuable insights into what is working on the ground in districts and States across the country to improve student outcomes, based on their involvement in RELs, CCs, EIR projects and other efforts.

Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to reach out to Rachel Dinkes, PhD, President and CEO of KA at [rdinkes@knowledgeall.net](mailto:rdinkes@knowledgeall.net) to connect and for further information about any of the recommendations in this memo.