U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Fiscal Years 2022–2026 Strategic Plan
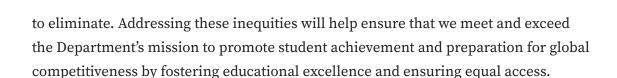
MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education

The scholar and novelist Ralph Ellison once wrote, "Education is all a matter of building bridges." As we enter a new era of possibility for our nation, education is the critical bridge to America's recovery, and it is foundational to our rebuilding and resiliency efforts. From prekindergarten through postsecondary learning, education has the power to lift communities, draw people together, strengthen our democracy, drive our economy, and meet our nation's vast potential. That is why the Department of Education (Department) and entire Biden–Harris Administration are committed to a long-term agenda that ensures every student receives what they need to thrive in school and pursue their vision of success—this is what this Strategic Plan seeks to achieve.

The Department has an opportunity and responsibility to support states, districts, teachers, school leaders, and institutions of higher education (IHEs) in delivering on America's promise of high-quality, equitable, and accessible education. As an educator myself, I take this charge seriously as I consider our policy and programmatic imperatives and their impact on all learners.

As the nation continues to reemerge from the pandemic, I am proud that the unprecedented resources provided through the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* are enabling districts, schools, and IHEs to not only recover and rebuild systems and supports to make this vision of an excellent, equitable education for all a reality but also help each student achieve academic success, including closing the gap from pandemic learning loss. Resources from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund and the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund are helping schools and colleges invest in the academic, social, emotional, and mental health resources that our students need and mitigate the impacts of the pandemic that, if left unaddressed, would continue longstanding inequities that we, at the Department, seek

to eliminate. Addressing these inequities will help ensure that we meet and exceed the Department's mission to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

I deeply believe that the Department is—and must function as—a service agency.

To fulfill this mission, we must work each day to meet the needs of every learner, and we must establish an inclusive and actionable agenda by hearing directly from those we serve: students, including student loan borrowers; teachers; parents and families; and their communities. That is one reason I have prioritized traveling across the country to listen to and learn from Americans in small, rural towns; suburban centers; and our largest cities. It is also why I will continue to ensure that our Department builds policy that centers the voices and experiences of our constituents.

This fiscal year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Strategic Plan reflects this commitment to service, equity, community building, and high-quality service standards for all our internal and external activities as well as President Biden's vision, which I share, of an excellent education system for all.

Equity is a cross-cutting priority integrated into every goal, objective, and strategy within the FY 2022–FY 2026 Strategic Plan. That is because the Department is committed to ensuring every student receives a high-quality education. We believe that all students—regardless of background or circumstance—need and deserve access to educational opportunity, including the resources, supports, and inclusive learning environments that will set them on pathways to succeed in school and in life.

This work to positively impact and engage students begins early, which is reflected in the Administration's deep commitment to universally accessible, high-quality prekindergarten rooted in development-focused learning. It is also why the Department will continue its significant investments in effective programs that reach infants and toddlers. Moving forward, we also will champion and work toward fully inclusive, high-quality early learning that reaches students who have been most underserved, including students with disabilities and students of color, in all communities across the country.
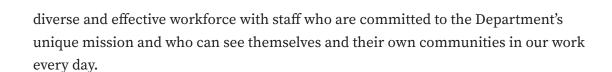
We will continue to prioritize equity and belonging by supporting students and educators in communities most in need and strengthening the continuum from prekindergarten through grade 12 and beyond, including career pathways, higher education, and the workforce. We also will support educators to accelerate students' learning and provide equitable access to high-quality programs and resources to ensure students thrive, no matter their zip code. And in all this work, this Strategic Plan will help guide the Department in providing educators and schools with the tools and resources to ensure students most impacted by the pandemic make strong academic progress and are able to succeed.

In higher education, we will work to improve completion rates and build a higher education system that is more affordable, promotes equitable opportunity and upward mobility, and ensures our postsecondary education efforts create pathways to emerging and growing industries and sectors. In doing this work, we will leverage education to meet the needs of the 21st century and our globally competitive economy.

We know that a high-quality education begins with excellent educators and administrators, and we support their in-service training and professional development throughout their careers. Through the work in this Strategic Plan, the Department will meet the President's call to strengthen the educator pipeline by diversifying the field, supporting teachers' professional growth, and respecting the teaching profession for what it is: the foundation for all other opportunities.

As we support educators to do their best work in classrooms, we will provide the resources and tools to help them meet students' holistic needs, ranging from their academic growth to their social and emotional development. Using the science of learning and development as a foundation, we will highlight the connections among academic achievement; innovative methods of instruction; and the welcoming, safe, and supportive environments for learning that must exist for students to thrive.

Finally, we will ensure that our commitment to positive outcomes for children, students, families, and learners of all ages and identities is mirrored in our internal practices and our commitment to an effectively run federal agency. We will prioritize information technology, the use of evidence, and data governance. We will be good stewards of federal funds and acquisition powers. We will recruit and retain a

diverse and effective workforce with staff who are committed to the Department's unique mission and who can see themselves and their own communities in our work every day.

We have an opportunity to strengthen the Department by continuing to listen to families, students, educators, staff, and partners. We have an opportunity to take what we have learned and turn it into action and empower every learner to pursue and achieve their version of the American dream. As dedicated public servants, we will work tirelessly to make progress toward ensuring every student has access to high-quality educational experiences that support their participation in our society, economy, and democracy. President Biden has said, "We are building the America we want to leave for future generations right now, and that work begins with education."

We are the foundation, and the goals in this Strategic Plan are the building blocks to help ensure education can be the bridge to thriving lives for every American.

As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, supported by unprecedented federal funding, we have a clear vision for what comes next: an American education system that serves all students, gives them a pathway to self-determined success, and values their identity and potential.

We are excited to embark on the tough but necessary work ahead of us, hand-in-hand with America's students, educators, families, and communities. We will meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century and beyond, and education will illuminate the path.

Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
Secretary of Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

APPENDIX C
FY 2022–FY 2026 Capacity Assessment

Introduction

Section 101 of the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018* (i.e., the Evidence Act) requires agency Evaluation Officers to "continually assess the coverage, quality, methods, consistency, effectiveness, independence, and balance of the portfolio of evaluations, policy research, and ongoing evaluation activities of the agency" and requires assessments be reported in each agency's Strategic Plan. This fiscal year (FY) 2022–FY 2026 Capacity Assessment includes six sections consistent with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance on implementing the Evidence Act. Section 1 begins with a list of activities and operations currently being evaluated and analyzed by the Department. In the five sections that follow it, the Department provides a brief assessment of the extent to which those activities and operations:

- Meet the needs of the Department's operating components (section 2).
- Meet the Department's learning, management, and accountability needs (section 3).
- Use appropriate analytic methods (section 4).
- Are supported by agency capacity for effective planning, execution, and dissemination (section 5).
- Are supported by agency capacity for effective use of evaluation evidence and data for analysis (section 6).

Readers should keep in mind that this document reflects the agency Evaluation Officer's assessment of the Department's evidence building and use capacity at the time it was written. Importantly, capacity is not fixed; it is the Department's goal to consistently increase its capacity to build and use evidence in service of meeting its mission.

Section 1: List of Activities and Operations Currently Being Evaluated and Analyzed

Relevant Law(s):	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(A) and OMB Circular No. A-11 Section 290.13
Relevant Statutory Language:	"...a list of the activities and operations of the agency that are currently being evaluated and analyzed...."

The Department conducts a wide range of analytic and evaluative activities every year. Most commonly, this involves individual offices reviewing program performance data for improvement purposes. Analyses of program performance data are also included in submissions to OMB and Congress as part of the annual budget process. Given their number and ubiquity across government, the Department does not list routine program performance activities in this Capacity Assessment.

Instead, the Department focuses on two streams of work: (1) novel analytic activities conducted in service of developing reports to Congress or publicly facing data and data tools and (2) implementation, output, and outcomes evaluations of federal education programs. The following table is illustrative of the Department's work but not exhaustive. As noted elsewhere in this Capacity Assessment, the Department does not have a comprehensive inventory of analytic activities underway at any given time. The following table lists the name of each activity along with the sponsoring office within the Department. Where possible, links are provided to explanatory narratives or prototypical analytic products developed as part of the evaluation or analysis activity.

Illustrative List of Data, Analytic, and Evaluation Activities

Department Component	Example Data, Data Tool, Analysis, or Evaluation Activity
FSA	Application Volume Reports, including *Free Application for Federal Student Aid®* (FAFSA®) data by demographic characteristics, by postsecondary school and state of legal residents, and by high school and public school district
FSA	Default Rates, including cohort default rates by school, lender, state, and institution type; cumulative default rates; and new direct loan default
FSA	Federal Student Loan Portfolio, including portfolio by loan type, age, debt size, location, school type, loan status, repayment plan, and delinquency status
FSA	Loan Forgiveness Reports, including forgiveness via Borrower Defense, Teacher Loan Forgiveness, Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), and Closed School Discharge
FSA	Title IV Program Volume Reports, including loans, grants, and campus-based aid programs

Department Component	Example Data, Data Tool, Analysis, or Evaluation Activity
IES	Condition of Education, including a new interactive web platform; the report includes key indicators on important developments and trends on all levels of education, labor force outcomes, and international comparisons, and these indicators are updated throughout the year as new data become available
IES	*Digest of Education Statistics*, including new machine-readable tables covering the broad field of American education from prekindergarten through graduate school and drawing on data from many sources, both government and private, but especially on the results of surveys and activities carried out by the National Center for Education Statistics
IES	The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Monthly School Survey, including school information on learning modalities offered by schools (in-person, hybrid, or remote) and enrolled in by students, as well as other information on school policies associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2021
IES	NAEP's The Nation's Report Card, including new visualizations and analyses showing what students know and can do in various subjects across the nation, states, and in some urban districts
IES	ED*Facts*, including prekindergarten through grade 12 data that supports planning, policymaking, and management/budget decision-making; centralizes data provided by state educational agencies; and collects data on districts and school demographics, program participation, and student performance
IES	The Common Core of Data, including a comprehensive, annual, national database and tools with information on all public elementary schools and districts in the United States
IES	The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, including a database and tools on the condition of postsecondary education in the United States, with information on enrollment, admissions, program completions, graduation rates, student financial aid, tuition and fees, faculty, staff, library data, and finances from postsecondary institutions
IES	Data Tools, including interactive online tools with data from national (e.g., NAEP) and international (e.g., Program for International Student Assessment and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) sources on student and adult performance and results from noncognitive surveys
IES	DataLab, including an online table and regression tool with data from more than 30 federal education datasets and recently updated to provide easier use and faster results
IES	NAEP's Mapping State Proficiency Standards studies, including analyses and tools that allow comparisons and tracking of proficiency criteria used on state assessments
IES	Evaluation of Title I Pilots That Provide Flexibility Under the *Every Student Succeeds Act*
IES	Evaluation of Transition Supports for Youth with Disabilities
IES	Evaluations of Federal Financial Aid Information and Delivery Strategies: An Experiment in the Federal Work Study Program to Encourage Student Jobs in the Private Sector
IES	Evaluations of Federal Financial Aid Information and Delivery Strategies: An Experiment Requiring Additional Loan Counseling for Student Borrowers
IES	Impact Evaluation of Teacher Residency Programs
IES	Impact Evaluation of Training in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for Reading in Early Elementary School

Department Component	Example Data, Data Tool, Analysis, or Evaluation Activity
IES	Impact Evaluation to Inform the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program
IES	Impact Study of Feedback for Teachers Based on Classroom Videos
IES	Impact Study of Magnet Schools
IES	Implementation Evaluation of the Title III National Professional Development Program
IES	Implementation of Key Federal Policies in the Wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic
IES	Implementation of Title I/II-A Program Initiatives
IES	National Evaluation of Career and Technical Education under Perkins V
IES	National Evaluation of the 2019 Comprehensive Centers Program Grantees
IES	National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Literacy State Development and Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Programs
IES	National Implementation Study of Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (Title IV, Part A)
IES	National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012
IES	National Study of the Implementation of Adult Education Under the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*
IES	Study of Charter School Admission Practices and Barriers to Growth
IES	Study of Data Disaggregation Initiative
IES	Study of District and School Uses of Federal Education Funds
IES	Study of Educational Policies, Supports and Practices for English Learners: Implementation of Title III and Social and Emotional Learning
IES	Study of School Improvement Plans and Their Implementation
IES	Study of Title II, Part A Use of Funds
IES	Text Ed: A Study of Text Messaging to Improve College Enrollment Rates Among Disadvantaged Adults
IES	The Effects of a Systematic Approach to Improving Quality in Afterschool Programs: An Impact Evaluation to Inform the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program
IES	*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* State and Local Implementation Study 2019
OCR	Civil Rights Data Collection
OCTAE	*Adult Education and Family Literacy Act* Program
OESE	Analysis for the *Annual Report of Children in Institutions for Neglected or Delinquent Children, Adult Correctional Institutions, and Community Day Programs for Neglected and Delinquent Children*
OESE	Analysis of the National Survey of Charter School Facilities
OESE	Analysis of Title II, Part A Use of Funds Survey
OESE	Study of State Policies to Prohibit Aiding and Abetting Sexual Misconduct in Schools
OPE	Analysis of Title II Teacher Quality Accountability Data

Department Component	Example Data, Data Tool, Analysis, or Evaluation Activity
OPEPD	Study of State Implementation of the Unsafe School Choice Option
OPEPD/ OCDO	Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Public Transparency Portal with COVID-19 pandemic relief data related to the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act*; the *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021*; and the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*
OPEPD/ OCDO	College Scorecard, including information on institution-of-higher-education (IHE)-level data on student characteristics, debt, and outcomes, including repayment rates, default rates, and earnings information obtained from the Internal Revenue Service
OPEPD/ OCDO	Open Data Platform serving as a single, searchable inventory of the Department's data assets and associated metadata
OPEPD/ OCDO	Data Maturity Assessment, an annual assessment of each principal operating component within the Department that measures maturity across 18 data-related process areas
OPEPD/ OCDO	Data and Evidence Use Survey, conducted in coordination with IES' National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, is a Department-wide annual assessment of staff ability to use data and evidence
OPEPD/ OCDO	ESF Annual Performance Reports include critical annual performance reporting for the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools, and equivalent Outlying Area funds
OSERS/ OSEP	Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*
OSERS/RSA	*Evaluation and Analysis of Case Service Reports* (RSA-911)
OSERS/RSA	*Evaluation and Analysis of Client Assistance Program Performance Reports* (RSA-227)
OSERS/RSA	*Evaluation and Analysis of Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights Program Performance Reports* (RSA-509)
OSERS/RSA	*Annual Report to Congress on Federal Activities under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, as amended
OSERS/RSA	*Evaluation and Analysis of WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Reports for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program* (ETA-9169)
OSERS/RSA	*Evaluation and Analysis of Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind Performance Reports (RSA-7-OB)*
OSERS/RSA	*Evaluation and Analysis of American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Performance Reports* (RSA-AIVRS)
OSERS/RSA	*Evaluation and Analysis of Randolph-Sheppard Performance Reports* (RSA-15)

Acronyms and Definitions:

FSA = Federal Student Aid; IES = Institute of Education Science; OCR = Office for Civil Rights; OCTAE = Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education; OESE = Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; OPE = Office of Postsecondary Education; OPEPD = Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development; OCDO = Office of the Chief Data Officer; OSERS = Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; OSEP = Office of Special Education Programs; RSA = Rehabilitation Services Administration; ETA = Employment and Training Administration; and AIVRS = American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Section 2: Extent to Which Efforts Support the Needs of Various Divisions

Relevant Law(s):	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(B) and OMB Circular No. A-11 Section 290.13
Relevant Statutory Language:	"... the extent to which the evaluations, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency support the needs of various divisions within the agency...."

For the purpose of this Capacity Assessment, the Department operationalizes this requirement to mean "the extent to which the Department's focal areas in its FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda are met by current or planned foundational fact finding, policy research, performance measurement, or program evaluation." Each of those areas is addressed here. The full Learning Agenda can be found in Appendix B.

Focus Area 1: Address the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Students, Educators, and Faculty

As noted in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department has a range of priority learning questions (PLQs) related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These include questions related to how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected student achievement and the operations of schools, districts, states, and institutions of higher education (IHEs). Perhaps more importantly, they also include questions that seek to identify the policies, programs, services, and practices that are effective in supporting a robust recovery and the transformation of the nation's education system to serve all students more equitably, particularly those who have been underserved.

The Department is actively building evidence in both domains; however, the urgency of the recovery effort, the complexity of the recovery-related questions, and the time required to conduct rigorous efficacy research suggest that even its best efforts may, to some, seem to fall short of meeting agency needs.

As described in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, evidence about the former set of questions is increasingly available either through the work of formative assessment providers or data collection efforts undertaken by the Department (e.g., the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Monthly School Survey; releases of preliminary Common Core of Data (CCD), National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) 2021 data related to the COVID-19 pandemic; data from the School Pulse Panel Survey and

the NAEP 2021 School and Teacher Questionnaire; the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance's (NCEE's) forthcoming Implementation of Key Federal Education Policies in the Wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic and Study of District and School Uses of Federal Education Funds; and the Office of the Chief Data Officer's (OCDO's) Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Public Transparency Portal). The portal serves as a preliminary window on how educational organizations are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows how COVID-19 pandemic relief funds were allocated to state educational agencies (SEAs), state governor's offices, and IHEs and how the allocated funds are being used. Data on grant expenditures lag considerably, however, so evidence based on that data will take more time to be reliable and actionable.

However, evidence on the latter questions—broadly, recovery-focused efficacy research—is comparatively scarce. In the recovery's early phase, the Department's immediate focus was the curation and broad diffusion of existing research to schools, states, districts, and IHEs (e.g., *ED COVID-19 Handbook* Volume 1, Volume 2, and Volume 3 as well as *Strategies for Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Address the Impact of Lost Instructional Time* and *Frequently Asked Questions Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Full-Service Community Schools & Related Strategies*). Shortly thereafter, key components of the Department turned more squarely toward evidence building, most notably the Institute of Education Sciences' (IES') National Center for Education Research (NCER) and National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER). IES currently has plans to invest up to $100 million in research and development activities focused on the design, testing, and dissemination of practices that accelerate learning. Importantly, however, this work will take time to unfold; findings from the bulk of this research are expected in FY 2026 and beyond.

Focus Area 2: Promote Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources, Opportunities, and Inclusive Environments

As described in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department seeks to build evidence in two broad domains related to equity. First, the Department seeks to better understand the extent to which the nation's students experience inequities in the access to or outcomes of educational programs and services the Department supports. Second, the Department seeks to identify which policies, programs, services, and practices are effective in remedying inequitable access to resources and

opportunities to learn and how to best ensure that all students experience education environments that are safe, are free from discrimination, and promote learning and development.

The Department is actively building evidence about the state of equity in the nation's education system and is placing increasing focus on equitable data activities. Even as the Department continues to invest in research, development, and dissemination activities related to safe and supportive learning environments, more evidence on effective policies and practices related to equitable distribution of resources may be needed. As noted in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Office for Civil Rights' Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is a critical tool in understanding the state of equity in the nation's kindergarten through grade 12 (i.e., K–12) schools. Other data and initiatives, including nearly all of the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES') assessments (e.g., NAEP, Program for International Student Assessment, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, and other international assessments), surveys (e.g., NTPS and the many longitudinal studies), and administrative data collections (e.g., ED*Facts*, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, the CCD Education Finance Center, the Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates Program, the Ed Tech Equity Initiative); the Department's College Scorecard and Open Data Platform; and information made available at Federal Student Aid's (FSA's) Data Center, support useful analysis of equity within the nation's primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Finally, consistent with the goals of Executive Order 13985, the Department anticipates that an increasing number of existing data collections—and most, if not all, new ones— will lend themselves to useful equity-focused analysis. Annual performance reports for the ESF grants, for example, asks grantees to report things such as how they supported certain learning recovery for subpopulations disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and for eligibility and participation student counts in underserved subgroups. Recognizing the grantees have not previously tracked demographic information to the level of detail requested, however, the more detailed data are optional on initial reports, with notice provided that it will be required in future reporting periods.

Although work of this type contributes to a more comprehensive description of equity in the nation's education system, it must be paired with high-quality evidence

on how to create environments that are, in fact, more equitable, welcoming, and supportive for all students. The Department's efforts in this regard are many, ranging from high-quality technical assistance (e.g., Equity Assistance Centers, the National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) to support for individual research efforts that have the potential to generalize broadly and shed light on classroom practice and the organization of education programs (e.g., ECHO: Prosocial and Positive School Climate, The Distributional Effects of Secondary Career and Technical Educational (CTE) Programs on Postsecondary Educational and Employment Outcomes: An Evaluation of Delaware's CTE Programs of Study, and Shaping Teacher Quality and Student of Color Experience in Massachusetts: Alignment of Preparation and Licensure Systems with Teacher Effects on Student non-Test Outcomes).

There has been comparatively less Department-sponsored research, however, on the equitable distribution of resources that make high-quality opportunities to learn more available to all students. Most research has focused on weighted student funding (WSF) approaches (e.g., *Districts' Use of Weighted Student Funding Systems to Increase School Autonomy and Equity: Findings From a National Study* and How do Spending Patterns Change with Weighted Student Funding (WSF), and What's Happening to Equity and Achievement, Particularly for Poor and At-Risk Students?). Other promising resource allocation strategies may be as, or more, effective than WSF in supporting the needs of all students, particularly those who are most underserved. As such, more work may be needed to explore strategies other than WSF if the Department hopes to accelerate progress toward its equity goals.

Focus Area 3: Support a Diverse and Talented Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning

Consistent with priorities outlined in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the Department has identified three ways in which it expects to build evidence that can inform its work to support a diverse, well-trained, and well-prepared educator workforce. First, it seeks to ensure that educators are prepared to support the full range of students' social, emotional, mental health, academic, and career needs. Second, the Department seeks to ensure in-service educators have access to high-quality professional development and opportunities for career growth to ensure that well-qualified educators remain in the classroom. Third, the Department seeks

to understand the extent to which the educator workforce, particularly those who are well-qualified in their specific field of instruction, reflect today's students and is equitably distributed among them.

The Department has a long-standing and well-developed portfolio of work on teacher professional development and recently began work on specific features of teacher preparation. Sample survey data on the teacher workforce are available, but more granular data may be required to meet some of the Department's goals. As is the case in other focal areas of the Learning Agenda, evidence building surrounding educators and educator preparation takes place in multiple locations across the Department; this includes both the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education's Effective Educator Development (EED) Program and IES. EED's Supporting Effective Educator Development Grant Program focuses on building rigorous evidence on grantee activities that focus on either teacher and principal development through nontraditional preparation pathways and professional growth through both advanced education credentials and high-quality professional development. IES also makes substantial investments in evaluation, research, and statistics related to educators each year. Over the past decade, IES has sponsored nearly two dozen evaluations focused on teachers and leaders, including work presently underway to better understand the role of teacher residency programs in preparing new teachers, improving instruction via feedback, and using teacher leader models. In that same time, NCER has supported more than 100 field-initiated grants to its Effective Instruction Program, including more than two dozen in the past five years alone. NCSER has funded about 35 grants through its Educators and School-Based Service Providers portfolio and 20 grants from a 2017 research competition focused solely on research on teachers and other instructional personnel.

NCES also collects survey data on the characteristics and experiences of the educator workforce, such as through the Teaching and Learning International Survey and NTPS. Other NCES data collections, such as the NAEP Survey Questionnaires and High School Longitudinal Study of 2009, collect data on both teacher and student characteristics and experiences. Examples of how those data are used include a 2017 NCES study titled Certification Status and Experience of U.S. Public School Teachers: Variation Across Student Subgroups, which analyzes the relationships between teacher characteristics/experiences and different student populations. To the extent the Department needs more detailed information about the alignment between

educator and student populations, additional data would need to be collected to meet its goals. The ESF Annual Performance Reports, in part, support that need. Data on how COVID-19 pandemic relief funds were used to launch new full-service community schools and hire or retain positions in several categories (i.e., special educators, bilingual or English as a second language educators, school counselors, and nurses, among others) are collected at the local educational agency (LEA) level, which can be linked with demographic data from other Department studies to inform teacher alignment with student populations.

Focus Area 4: Meet Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs

Promoting growth across a range of important learning and developmental outcomes, including social, emotional, academic, and career needs—particularly for students belonging to groups that have been underserved by the nation's education system—is a priority in the Department's FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda. Efficacy research on specific strategies is of particular importance.

This area is a particular strength for the Department. Over time, anticipated activities that span (and predate) the FY 2022–2026 period are likely to make substantial contributions to the evidence base. In addition to field-initiated research sponsored by IES, the Department has identified several opportunities to explicitly build evidence on effective strategies for supporting students' academic-, social-, emotional-, and career-development needs. As noted in the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, as part of its FY 2021 Education Innovation and Research Program, the Department published a Notice of Inviting Applications that included an absolute priority for mid-phase projects that "promote social and emotional learning skills that prepare students to be informed, thoughtful, and productive individuals." The Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), as part of the National Evaluation of Career and Technical Education Under Perkins V, is collaborating with NCEE to design multiple efficacy trials of interventions explicitly designed to promote career development, including the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to succeed in high-demand careers. Other activities poised to support the Department's evidence-building need include projects such as NCES' Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Program, which collects data on children's socio-emotional development from birth through elementary school, and NCEE's National Evaluation of the Comprehensive Literacy State Development and Striving Readers Comprehensive

Literacy Programs and the Study of Educational Policies, Supports and Practices for English Learners: Implementation of Title III and Social and Emotional Learning. The ESF Annual Performance Reports also collect data on how the COVID-19 pandemic relief funds were used to support social, emotional, and other needs as well as specific fund usage supporting mental health for students and staff.

Focus Area 5: Increase Postsecondary Value by Focusing on Equity-Conscious Strategies to Address Affordability, Completion, Post-Enrollment Success, and Support for Inclusive Institutions

The Department's FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda includes PLQs focused on postsecondary, adult, and continuing education that fall in to two broad domains. First, the Department hopes to explore the policies, programs, practices, services, and practices that are associated with postsecondary access and success, with an emphasis on affordability and better meeting the needs of traditionally underserved students. Second, the Department seeks to better understand its institutional support programs, including those focused on Minority-Serving Institutions, Tribal colleges or universities, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Over time, the Department has used foundational fact finding and program evaluation to build evidence about college access, affordability, and completion. In terms of foundational fact finding, NCES collects data on the characteristics of students in postsecondary education, persistence and degree attainment, transition to employment, and school and work experiences through its NPSAS, Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, and the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. Research and evaluation activities, including those sponsored by IES and the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE), have sought to build evidence relevant to student access and success. Recent examples include IES' work on enhanced college advising programs within Upward Bound (i.e., Effectiveness of Promising Strategies in Federal College Access Programs: Study of Enhanced Advising to Improve College Fit in Upward Bound), text-based supports for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) students (i.e., Effectiveness of Promising Strategies in Federal College Access Programs: Study of College Transition Text Messaging in GEAR UP), and efforts to improve enrollment for adult students traditionally underserved by higher education (i.e., Text Ed: A Study of Text Messaging to Improve College Enrollment Rates Among Disadvantaged Adults).

Additional work supporting this focus area is happening elsewhere within the Department. For example, OCDO's College Scorecard provides IHE-level data on postsecondary student characteristics, debt, and outcomes, including completion, repayment, default, and earnings, among others. OPE has used grant-based mechanisms—most notably the First in the World tiered evidence program—to develop and test innovative approaches to supporting postsecondary persistence and completion. Less research, however, has been conducted on policies and practices designed to transform postsecondary institutions themselves (e.g., articulation policies, advising reform, curricular redesign, and reforms in the assessment of student learning). To be sure, exceptions exist, most notably within the domain of developmental education reform (e.g., The Implementation, Impact, and Cost-Effectiveness of Developmental Education Curricular Reform in California Community Colleges, Exploring Co-Requisite Developmental Education Models, and Changing Policy and Practice in Developmental Education: Assessing the Evidence and Engaging the Field). However, additional evidence building that assesses the feasibility and efficacy of strategies that change systems within and between postsecondary institutions in service of student success may be needed to meet the Department's Strategic Goals.

Focus Area 6: Effectively Manage Federal Student Aid Programs

Finally, the Department's FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda includes a series of PLQs related to evidence building in service of improving the design and delivery of its federal student aid programs. This includes work on improving the customer experience, better understanding how aid programs are associated with and can be used to bolster student academic and post-completion success, and supporting borrowers in successfully managing their student loan debt.

The Department needs to maintain (or strengthen) its capacity to conduct research and analysis critical to the operations of the federal student aid program while building capacity related to addressing its PLQs. Notwithstanding the PLQs set forth in the Department's FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, FSA has wide-ranging operational questions and concerns—some stemming from the recent COVID-19 pandemic, others as a result of its own Strategic Goals and objectives as identified in its *Fiscal Year 2020 through 2024 Strategic Plan*—that must be appropriately resourced and addressed. Whereas many of those questions are consistent with the broad goals

of the FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, the challenge facing the Department is how, to the extent possible, to build all the evidence that is a priority for internal stakeholders. Existing projects have demonstrated the value of strong collaborations between FSA and evidence-building partners. Examples include recently completed, planned, and ongoing evaluations of FSA experimental sites by NCEE (e.g., Evaluation of the Pell Grant Experiments Under the Experimental Sites Initiative and Evaluations of Federal Financial Aid Information and Delivery Strategies: An Experiment in the Federal Work Study Program to Encourage Student Jobs in the Private Sector); a historic collaboration between FSA and NCES in the production of the NPSAS and its longitudinal follow-ups; and work between FSA and OCDO on the College Scorecard. However, the Department's FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda envisions answering questions that will require new lines of research, new collaborations, and most likely, new resources. Meeting those challenges represents a significant opportunity for the Department to benefit the nation's students, particularly those who have been underserved by postsecondary education. Building human, analytic, and resource capacity in this space must become a shared priority.

Section 3: Extent to Which Efforts Are Balanced

Relevant Law(s):	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(C) and OMB Circular No. A-11 (2020) Section 290.13
Relevant Statutory Language:	"… the extent to which the evaluation, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency address an appropriate balance between needs related to organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, interagency and private sector coordination, internal and external oversight, and accountability.…"

For the purposes of this Capacity Assessment, the Department operationalizes this requirement as the extent to which Department evidence-building activities support organizational learning; performance, program, and strategic management; and accountability for results on Agency Priority Goals (APGs).

The Department focuses its discussion on its APGs for three reasons. First, by definition, APGs reflect agency leadership's top priorities and are meant to include only those areas in which significant progress and change are needed most. Second, given their time-bound nature (i.e., APGs are meant to be achievable within 24 months), APGs demand high-quality, current data to support senior leadership's strategic management efforts. Finally, senior leaders are personally—and publicly

via Performance.Gov—accountable for achieving APGs. Although not reflecting the totality of the Department's evidence needs, APGs are, by definition, among the highest priority.

The Department has developed three APGs relevant to this Strategic Plan. The proposed APGs focus on (1) addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, educators, and faculty; (2) effectively managing federal student loans, including the repayment experience and outcomes of federal student loan borrowers; and (3) reducing the disparities in attainment of high-quality degrees and credentials. However, the extent to which the Department can successfully leverage evidence in support of organizational learning; performance, program, a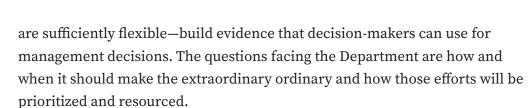nd strategic management; and accountability for results in these three areas will be a useful barometer in gauging its ability to balance three sometimes competing prerogatives across its wider portfolio.

Although the Department has already begun to take steps related to its proposed APGs, it is too early to assess whether its evidence-building and use activities will be put to their best use in achieving them. In the coming months, this assessment will be updated to reflect the Department's assessment of progress in that area. Currently, however, the Department notes the following:

- Most of the outcome metrics identified for its APGs are available in existing Department data systems, although their timeliness varies. Most lag by one or more quarters, rather than being "near real time." This may result in evidence that is suitable for accountability purposes and future organizational learning but not sufficient to support more immediate management decisions about program administration and/or performance and strategic decision-making.

- The Department has demonstrated the ability to rapidly augment its data collections to build new evidence when existing systems were not originally built to provide it. NCES was able to leverage its existing NAEP School Survey to rapidly collect and report data about school reopening and learning modality, yielding actionable information for decision-makers that lagged by only a few weeks rather than multiple quarters or years. Similar work, done by OCDO, has given the public rapid and unprecedented insight into entities' use of federal recovery funds. Both demonstrate that the Department can—when conditions warrant, infrastructure is in place, and systems

are sufficiently flexible—build evidence that decision-makers can use for management decisions. The questions facing the Department are how and when it should make the extraordinary ordinary and how those efforts will be prioritized and resourced.

- The Department has a structure for regular quarterly performance review that involves senior career and political leadership that could, at the discretion of the new Deputy Secretary, be used not only to drive internal accountability but also to support learning-focused conversations designed to support program performance.

As the agency finalizes metrics for monitoring its progress toward achieving its APGs, this Capacity Assessment will be updated to reflect the Department's progress in building and using evidence in a balanced fashion.

Section 4: Extent to Which Methods are Appropriate

Relevant Law(s):	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(D)
Relevant Statutory Language:	"… the extent to which the agency uses methods and combinations of methods that are appropriate to agency divisions and corresponding research questions being addressed, including an appropriate combination of formative and summative evaluation research and analysis approaches."

The Department employs a set of interrelated policies, standards, and guidelines to ensure that evidence builders use analytic methods appropriate to the questions they seek to answer. Generally, the Department's aim is to use the most rigorous methods appropriate to a given question, subject to constraints, including the time horizon in which results are needed, return on investment, and the amenability of a question to rigorous research and evaluation.

Program Evaluations

Consistent with OMB M-20-12, *Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices*, the Department places considerable emphasis on methodological rigor in its program evaluations. (Specific practices are detailed in the Department's Evaluation Policy.) Those evaluations are of three types: (1) impact evaluations, which make causal claims about interventions' effects on outcomes; (2) outcome evaluations, which make claims of association between interventions and outcomes; and

(3) implementation evaluations, which make descriptive claims about program operations. Generally, IES and NCEE do not make a sharp distinction between formative evaluations (i.e., evaluations primarily oriented toward program improvement) and summative evaluations (i.e., evaluations primarily oriented toward determining impact). Every well-designed evaluation represents an opportunity to improve program performance and support organizational learning and, when conditions permit, make statements about the effect of a program on its individual beneficiaries and the larger education system.

At present, IES' NCEE conducts all Department program evaluations. Only randomized control trials are used in NCEE impact evaluations. Outcome evaluations can employ a wider range of methods, including matching designs, difference-in-difference designs, comparative interrupted time-series designs, and regression discontinuity designs. Implementation evaluations use a wide range of descriptive quantitative methods, often complemented by qualitative findings (e.g., case studies).

Statistical Collections

Consistent with OMB M-15-03, *Department Support of Implementation of Statistical Policy Directive 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units*, the Department is committed to conducting objective, credible, and accurate statistical activities that can address its evidence needs and those of its stakeholders.

IES' NCES is the Department's principal statistical agency and is responsible for the bulk of its statistical collections. Specific practices NCES uses to ensure that its procedures and methods are appropriate to the questions official statistics seek to answer are detailed in its Statistical Standards. These standards cover all phases of a study's life cycle, including developing concepts and methods, planning and designing surveys, collecting data, editing and processing data, analyzing data and producing estimates or projections, establishing review procedures, and disseminating data. NCES' Statistical Standards are periodically revised to align to new methods, technologies, and federal guidance, all to ensure the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of NCES data collections, statistical analyses, and reporting.

The standards describe the steps NCES takes to protect individually identifiable information of its respondents, as required by law. This requirement includes protecting the information during the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of the data. NCES' Statistical Standards and Data Confidentiality staff unit has two major functions in the area of information protection. First, the unit directs the NCES Disclosure Review Board (DRB) comprised of members from each NCES division, representatives from the Statistical Standards and Data Confidentiality staff, and a member from each IES center. The NCES DRB works in coordination with the Department's central DRB and reviews disclosure risk analyses conducted by IES and NCES staff and contractors to ensure that data released do not disclose the identity of any individual respondent. The second major activity in this area is the Restricted-Use Data (RUD) Licensing Program. The licensing program provides external researchers with access to individually identifiable IES and NCES data covered under federal statutes and regulations by subjecting authorized researchers to the laws, regulations, and penalties that apply to use of confidential data held by IES. NCES recently partnered with the Coleridge Initiative to provide affordable, remote, and secure access to NCES RUD data sets. In 2020, NCES granted approximately 1,200 RUD licenses and had approximately 3,800 researchers using these licenses.

Policy and Other Analyses

Charged with carrying out the responsibilities under 44 U.S.C. § 3520, OCDO is responsible for managing and improving the Department's ability to leverage data as a strategic asset. Housed within the Department's principal office responsible for policy development (i.e., the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (OPEPD)), OCDO's Division of Analytics and Infrastructure serves as the Department's internal consultants for policy analysis and data science. It provides analytical support to principal operating components (POCs), supporting the improvement of decision-making; optimization of programs for desired outcomes; and the generation of efficiencies to reduce burden, improper payments, and other risks. It does this through cutting-edge and emerging methods, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence for program optimization, predictive analytics, and the development of other analytical products.

Among other responsibilities, OCDO's Division of Governance and Strategy is responsible for evaluating data for value, risk, and quality, including agency policies

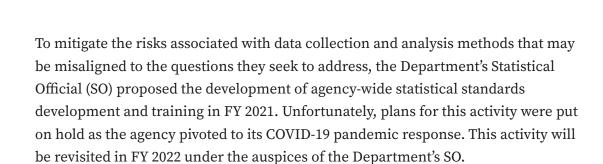related to the *Information Quality Act*. The Department's Information Quality Guidelines outline the ways in which it seeks to ensure the utility, objectivity, and integrity of information it disseminates to the public, including information stemming from research studies. Central to the Department's efforts to produce objective information is ensuring that the data-collection and -analysis methods used in its generation are appropriate to the information's eventual purpose. This includes research questions that are clearly stated and posed in an objective manner, well-designed and clearly described methods, and conclusions that are strongly supported by the data. Peer review is also required for Department research and evaluation activities.

Evaluation Officer's Commentary on Program Evaluations and Statistical Collections

All NCEE evaluations and NCES statistical collections are subject to both internal and external peer review. This helps ensure that NCEE and NCES staff and contractors have effectively implemented the procedures and methods identified. The external review process is managed by the IES Standards and Review Office, which is headed by the institute's Deputy Director of Science and is independent from both NCEE and NCES. IES peer reviewers are nationally and internationally known experts in their fields and confirm that they have no conflict of interest with the study under review. Taken together, these processes offer reasonable confidence that the methods being used are appropriate to the questions they seek to address.

Evaluation Officer's Commentary on Other Analyses

The Department does not systematically catalog the totality of "administrative and support tasks … that are currently being evaluated and analyzed." In principle, each of these efforts should be undertaken in a manner that comports with existing Information Quality Guidelines. However, without a complete roster of other analyses and information about how they are conducted, it is not possible to assess the extent to which those analyses, and any non-NCES data collections upon which they depend, are being conducted in a manner appropriate to the questions they seek to address. As a part of the Department's Data Strategy and response to the Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) Management Challenges, the Department plans to consider updates to its Information Quality Act Guidelines in FY 2022 and establish new processes that ensure data quality is fit for its purpose.

To mitigate the risks associated with data collection and analysis methods that may be misaligned to the questions they seek to address, the Department's Statistical Official (SO) proposed the development of agency-wide statistical standards development and training in FY 2021. Unfortunately, plans for this activity were put on hold as the agency pivoted to its COVID-19 pandemic response. This activity will be revisited in FY 2022 under the auspices of the Department's SO.

Section 5: Extent to Which Evaluation and Research Capacity Is Present

Relevant Law(s):	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(E) and OMB Circular No. A-11 Section 290.13
Relevant Statutory Language:	"… the extent to which evaluation and research capacity is present within the agency to include personnel and agency processes for planning and implementing evaluation activities, disseminating best practices and findings, and incorporating employee views and feedback."

Personnel

Evaluation

IES' NCEE currently conducts all Department program evaluations. Within NCEE, program evaluations are directly overseen by the center's Associate Commissioner for Evaluation. Staffing within NCEE has remained stable. As of September 2021, the Evaluation Division employs 14 full-time employees (FTEs). NCEE evaluators include General Schedule (GS)-0110 economists and GS-1730 education research analysts. Most evaluators have the terminal degree in their field, such as Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), or Master of Public Policy (MPP) degrees.

Each staff member is assigned a specific topical area of responsibility (e.g., adult education) that aligns to the function of a specific Department program office (e.g., OCTAE's Adult Education Branch). More NCEE staff members are assigned to prekindergarten through grade 12 and special education topics than to topics focused on postsecondary, adult, or career education. Currently, one staff member is responsible for the entirety of NCEE's adult education portfolio, and two are responsible for its postsecondary portfolio, one of whom also serves as the Associate Commissioner for NCEE's Evaluation Division.

Statistical Collections

NCES is also responsible for conducting and analyzing the Department's statistical data collections as well as ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of its collections,
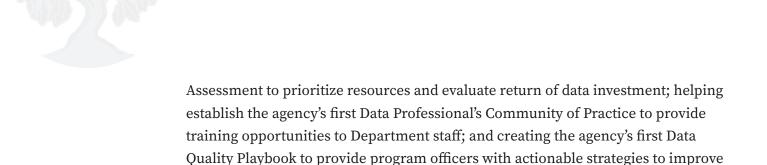
in coordination with the Department's Privacy Program. Within NCES, collections, analyses, reporting, and confidentiality are directly overseen by the center's Commissioner.

Staffing within NCES has declined. As of November 2021, NCES employs 92 FTEs. This is down from 2020, when there were 106 FTEs. Many NCES staff are in the statistics (GS-1530) or mathematical statistics (GS-1529) series. Other staff include GS-1730 education research analysts, GS-0343 management and program analysts, and others. Most staff have the terminal degree in their field, such as the Ph.D., Ed.D., or MPP. Each staff member is typically assigned to a division focusing on a specific type of data collection (e.g., assessment, sample surveys, or administrative data) or on statistical standards and data confidentiality. NCES has well defined and proven processes to maintain its high standards, mitigate the risk of data disclosure, and ensure confidentiality. However, this work takes significantly longer than desired with the current level of staff—five FTE—even with the support of contractors. As NCES will not take on more risk with the data we protect as the demand increases with the Evidence Act, the alternatives are to either increase the FTE sufficient to manage the activities (e.g., the eight FTE requested by NCES) or significantly lengthen the already long response times needed to protect data from risk.

Data

Charged with carrying out the responsibilities under 44 U.S.C. § 3520, OCDO is responsible for managing and improving the Department's ability to leverage data as a strategic asset. Beyond the team historically overseeing the Department's responsibilities under the *Paperwork Reduction Act*, OCDO has only two FTEs dedicated to supporting development and execution of OCDO and Department policies on life cycle data management, data resources, data protection, data quality, access, and dissemination, all key components of the Evidence Act.

Despite these limited resources, OCDO has been responsible for drafting the agency's first-ever Data Workforce Plan that maps solutions for identified gaps based on the Department's Data Competency Framework; serving as program managers for the Department's Data Governance Board (DGB), which serves as the agency-wide forum for identifying data challenges and strategic solutions; creating the Department's first Data Strategy, which established a multiyear plan to improve the Department's ability to create and use data; administering for each POC its annual Data Maturity

Assessment to prioritize resources and evaluate return of data investment; helping establish the agency's first Data Professional's Community of Practice to provide training opportunities to Department staff; and creating the agency's first Data Quality Playbook to provide program officers with actionable strategies to improve collections.

Other Evidence-Building Partners
Program offices are primarily responsible for the analysis of performance data and related policy analyses. They are supported by evidence-building partners including OPEPD's Grants Policy Office (GPO), OCDO, and the Department's Budget Service (BS). Specific staffing models vary widely within and across the Department's POCs.

Planning and Implementation

The Department's capacity to plan evidence building and use activities extend beyond staff assigned to NCEE. Evidence is a team sport at the Department and includes staff from the Department's program offices, including OPEPD's GPO, OCDO, NCES, SO, BS, and the Office of the General Counsel (OGC).

Evidence-building activities are typically identified and designed via collaboration between individual programs and the appropriate Department evidence-building partners, including (1) OCDO, GPO, and BS for performance data and policy analysis; (2) NCEE and, as needed, BS, OGC, and OPEPD for program evaluations; and (3) NCES for statistical collections. Joint planning activities, piloted in FY 2021, yielded mixed results. Although evidence-building partners reported a greater understanding of each other's activities, many found the process overly burdensome. The Department continues to explore ways to seamlessly introduce opportunities for collaboration into the rhythm of the business so they are viewed as a natural extension of existing work rather than a new expectation.

The Department's challenges with planning and managing its own data for evidence building have been well-documented. Since 2008, the Department's OIG has annually identified data as its own major management challenge. To help POCs prioritize their own data investments, OCDO administered the agency's first-ever annual data maturity assessment in 2020 and did so for each of the 15 POCs across the Department. Using standard industry measures, the Department found that nearly every POC had opportunities to improve POC-level processes—including those related

to data quality and infrastructure—even though POCs generally prioritize, request, and manage their own budgetary resources supporting those processes. Although successes were noted across the Department, the inability to pool funds across programs generally creates, at best, siloed solutions in data infrastructure. Guided by the Department's Data Strategy, in 2021 OCDO launched an effort to identify redundancies in data investments and create a target state agency-wide process for data investment planning that would promote modernization and efficiency.

Once planned, how evidence-building activities are ultimately implemented varies. As described elsewhere, NCES is the Department's designated principal statistical agency and is responsible for foundational fact finding undertaken for statistical purposes. NCEE's staff of professional evaluators design plans for rigorous implementation and outcome evaluations and then oversee their successful execution by third-party research firms. As noted, evidence building focused on the analysis of performance data, and the analysis of those and other data for policymaking, is typically the responsibility of program offices and OPEPD evidence-building partners. As discussed next, the human, financial, and data resources available to these partners to execute evidence-building plans also varies.

Dissemination

Program Evaluations

Even prior to the establishment of the Department's Evaluation Policy, NCEE's Standards and Practices document (now replaced in its entirety by the Evaluation Policy) placed an emphasis on transparency of evaluation findings. That is, all evaluations were posted to the NCEE website following approval by the IES Standards and Review Office and a two-week notification period afforded the Secretary, during which time program leaders were briefed on evaluation findings.

Statistical Products

The dissemination of NCES statistical products is guided by OMB Statistical Policy Directive #1 (*Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units*), OMB Statistical Policy Directive #4 (*Release and Dissemination of Statistical Products Produced by Federal Statistical Agencies*), and NCES' Statistical Standards. NCES strives to ensure that, among other things, the dissemination of public data is timely, that notices of releases are publicly available and that the public is notified of schedule changes in the releases, all users have equitable access to the

data, a variety of dissemination techniques are utilized, the public is notified about any changes to the released data, complete documentation of dissemination policies is provided to the public, there is outreach to the media, and that any public access to prerelease products remain embargoed and secure. NCES' statistical products are posted to the NCES website following their approval by NCES' Statistical Standards and Data Confidentiality unit, NCES' Commissioner, and IES' Director. Before products are publicly available, Department staff, including the Secretary, are briefed on the main findings.

Dissemination of evaluation findings and statistical products has typically taken three forms.

First, once posted to the IES website, IES sends "NewsFlashes" for all releases via its social media channels. This includes an email listserv, which has 11,000 subscribers to the NCEE Evaluation Reports topic; the @IESResearch Twitter account, which has 20,400 subscribers; Facebook, which includes 2,000 followers; and LinkedIn, which has 200 followers.

Second, IES engages in targeted dissemination to government partners who might benefit from research, evaluation, and statistical products and findings. This includes staff within the Department, including program staff, colleagues in mission-support offices (e.g., OGC, BS, and OPEPD), and other colleagues in IES; staff at OMB or the Government Accountability Office (GAO); and staff to authorizing and appropriating committees of Congress.

Third, in some instances, IES engages in targeted dissemination to communities of education practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Examples include a presentation to national advocacy associations, the design and dissemination of practitioner-facing materials arising from an evaluation (e.g., manuals that describe how to implement a tested intervention), and presentations at academic conferences or articles in professional journals.

Notably, under the leadership of the IES Director, IES has sought to improve the usability of content going into its existing dissemination channels. Upon the Director's arrival in spring 2018, he sought to move IES toward shorter, approachable formats. As a result, most new IES products come in three formats: a 15-page primary

report with supporting appendices, a 4-page "leave behind" for stakeholders and informed audiences that offers high-level detail of the study's purpose and findings, and a 1-page "snapshot" for senior leaders and media that focuses on key takeaways.

Employee and Stakeholder Feedback

NCEE staff engage program office staff in the initial conceptualization of evaluation studies in an effort to ensure they are relevant and timely. Program office staff typically are also involved in the design and execution of a study and its resulting products by virtue of their participation in Technical Working Group meetings, which are held at key points in the study life cycle. Technical Working Groups also engage stakeholders outside the Department, including other government partners (e.g., OMB and GAO), university-based researchers, experts at social research consultancies, educators, and advocates.

NCES regularly engages with its key stakeholders, including SEAs, LEAs, schools, IHEs, educators, other respondents, policymakers, researchers, subject matter experts, the public, and the other countries with whom the United States participates in international studies. NCES convenes standing committees of state representatives and subject matter experts; collaborates with SEA and LEA staff dedicated to the NAEP program; coordinates with national associations representing states, large city schools, educators, and other stakeholders; and convenes topic-specific panels of experts to provide the center with guidance in the design, administration, analysis, and reporting of its studies.

Evaluation Officer's Commentary on the Presence of Evaluation Capacity

The Department is widely held across the federal government to be a leader in rigorous program evaluation, statistical activities, and evidence building, and that reputation is well-deserved. The Department has a strong, centralized evaluation service that, compared to some other agencies, is well-staffed with highly trained evaluation professionals. Its evaluation function is also autonomous and committed to transparency, objectivity, and privacy. The Department's statistical agency, NCES, is also renowned nationally. However, its staffing is low relative to other federal statistical agencies. NCES is the third largest of the principal federal statistical agencies in terms of program dollars but one of the smallest in terms of full-time

staff. To maintain its national leadership, the Department may wish to consider several opportunities for improvement in FY 2022 and beyond.

Personnel

Most NCEE program evaluation staff are currently tasked with evaluating the Department's K–12 programs; only three have direct responsibility for evaluating postsecondary or adult education programs. Because the amount of evidence needed to support K–12-focused programs has continued to grow, reassignment of staff from K–12 programs to postsecondary programs has been avoided. The resulting disparity diminishes NCEE's capacity to independently evaluate *Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA)* Title IV federal student aid programs and other critical programs that support postsecondary students and institutions. Staffing constraints also limits the extent to which NCEE can contribute to a fulsome implementation of the Evidence Act. All Evidence Act requirements have been added to the duties of existing staff rather than hiring new staff to support Evidence Act implementation.

Similarly, without additional staff, it has been—and will continue to be—challenging for NCES to implement the Evidence Act's key requirements found in Title III. Absent new hiring, NCES will need to reduce key statistical activities and possibly eliminate whole data-collection programs to fulfill those requirements. Since NCES plays a central role in developing foundational fact finding with its data collections for developing evidence required in the Evidence Act, it is important that NCES not move staff from those data-collection efforts to those activities fulfilling the requirements found in Title III. To help ensure that the SO fulfills the relevant requirements in the Evidence Act while allowing NCES to perform its regular statistical activities and data collections, NCES has proposed the hiring of eight new full-time staff for FY 2022. The proposed new staff will assist the SO and NCES in developing greater capacity to fulfill the requirements in Title III of the Evidence Act, such as developing and overseeing data quality and confidentially standards, sharing and protecting *Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act* data sets, and implementing the standard application process for accessing data sets for developing evidence.

Planning and Implementing

The planning process piloted during FY 2021 resulted in some lessons learned. In FY 2022, each evidence-building partner will meet separately with program office

counterparts for needs sensing in addition to having a cohesive initial conversation. This will ensure that needs are surfaced in sufficient detail so as to be actionable and so that program office staff have an opportunity to develop a working relationship with their GPO, OCDO, and NCEE counterparts. However, this means the results of needs-sensing activities must be intentionally shared among evidence-building offices to promote coordination, reduce duplication, and identify opportunities for synergies and project improvements.

The Department has identified two challenges to getting high-quality evaluation findings into the hands of decision-makers quickly: (1) improving procurement processes and (2) accelerating data collection. Progress has been made on both fronts. First, IES has launched a Project Management Office charged with identifying best practices in procurement government-wide and then promoting the use of those practices across IES. NCEE stands to benefit from that work and will share findings from its work with others in the federal evidence community. Separately, NCEE has increased its use of more flexible acquisition vehicles to reduce the time between identifying an evaluation requirement and awarding a new task order to begin work. Second, NCEE has worked with OCDO and colleagues in OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs to approve a new "generic" clearance for design studies, field tests, and exploratory data collections. This clearance will allow NCEE to begin some types of information collection more rapidly, reducing the time between instrument development and data analysis.

The Department continues to struggle with uneven resources to execute against its full evidence-building agenda. This affects efforts to conduct rigorous evaluations, use data for program improvement and policy analysis, and maximize the use of statistical data.

Both the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* make substantial resources available to NCEE to conduct rigorous program evaluations. In contrast, authorizing legislation for many of the Department's other programs include little or no dedicated evaluation funding. In recent budget proposals, the Department has signaled its belief that more resources should be dedicated to supporting evidence building in postsecondary education. This is consistent with the Department's proposed FY 2022–FY 2026 Learning Agenda, in which postsecondary education represents a significant

share of the Department's evidence-building needs. Should additional resources for postsecondary evaluation become available, NCEE staffing patterns will most certainly need to be adjusted in response. Because NCEE's K–12 remit is not likely to shrink, the Department will be forced to either accept a decreased level of service in the K–12 evaluation space or hire additional program evaluators with postsecondary expertise, or some combination of both.

A resource of another type—business process and performance data—hinders the Department's efforts at program improvement and policy analysis. The Department's own Inspector General has consistently challenged it to improve its data, data systems, and use of data. Similarly, research conducted by OCDO has demonstrated both office-specific and enterprise-wide gaps in data maturity. Filling these gaps is likely to require significant and systematic investments in data governance, analytic infrastructure, and experts skilled in the collection and use of education data.

The agency would greatly benefit from a single dedicated funding stream to develop, prioritize, and finance enterprise-wide data management initiatives—to include data accessibility, infrastructure, standards, linkages, and training—in support of and on behalf of each of these POCs. Not unlike the dedicated evaluation set-aside currently authorized by ESEA and recommended for programs authorized by HEA, the Department recommends identifying a dedicated funding stream for data governance, infrastructure, and performance and policy analysis. To do so, Evidence Act officials have recommended allowing the Department to reserve and pool up to 0.25 percent of discretionary program accounts, such as those under *Every Student Succeeds Act* and HEA, to promote modernization and efficiency in enterprise data. This recommendation would expand the evidence-building capacity of the Department beyond what other existing or proposed set-asides related to evaluation can offer alone. Supported by the Department's DGB (where each Department's POC is represented, along with the Performance Improvement Officer, Evaluation Officer, SO, and Senior Agency Official for Privacy) and guided by the long-term goals and near-term objectives identified in the Department's Data Strategy, these funds would be stewarded by OCDO to ensure the Department meets the requirements of Title II of the Evidence Act.

Finally, to realize the Evidence Act's vision for improving the quality and confidentiality of statistical data, modernizing the Department's approach to sharing

and protecting confidential statistical data, and improving researcher access to statistical data, NCES would benefit from targeted investments of both contract and staff resources. This could include, but would not be limited to, hiring new staff members who could oversee the development of new statistical tools and methods for improving data quality and protecting confidential data; hiring staff with expertise at the nexus of information technology and statistical practice to liaise with the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), OCDO, and others in the federal data and statistical systems to ensure that NCES can better ensure the protection of data collected under a pledge of confidentiality; and implementing requirements associated with a standard application process for researcher access to confidential data and/or the eventual development of a national secure data service.
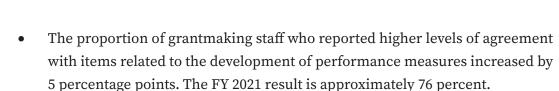
Dissemination and Stakeholder Feedback

IES, in particular, has taken steps to make its products more engaging and consumable by an informed lay audience. However, work remains to determine whether these or other actions by the Department have translated to increased dissemination and, more importantly, greater use of research evidence (URE) by internal and external stakeholders. URE is a function of several factors, including timeliness, relevance, usability, and contextual factors, that can serve as supports or barriers to the use of evidence in policymaking and practice. Despite its importance, the Department has yet to invest in a systematic investigation of its own URE and how it might be improved. Should resources become available, Department evidence-building partners should prioritize this work to maximize their impact.

Section 6: Extent to Which Evaluation and Evidence-Use Capacity is Present

Relevant Law(s):	5 USC § 306(a)(9)(F) and OMB Circular No. A-11 Section 290.13
Relevant Statutory Language:	"… the extent to which the agency has the capacity to assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations."

The Department conducted two Department-wide Data and Evidence Use Surveys—one in FY 2020 and one in FY 2021. The Evidence Use component of the survey was left unchanged between the two iterations to promote longitudinal analysis. Key findings across the FY 2020 and FY 2021 surveys include the following:

- The proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to the development of performance measures increased by 5 percentage points. The FY 2021 result is approximately 76 percent.
- There was a slight decline in the proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to the analysis of performance measures, from about 67 percent in FY 2020 to 65 percent in FY 2021.
- There was a very slight decline in the proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to explaining and applying Department evidence standards to grantees, from about 63 percent to 62 percent. This result is despite efforts to increase staff awareness of evidence standards. In February 2021, IES' What Works Clearinghouse team released a new training video explaining its ratings and how to use the clearinghouse to determine whether a listed policy, practice, or program has evidence of effectiveness.
- There was a very minor increase in the proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to supervisor support for a culture of evidence use in their unit, from about 80 percent to 81 percent.
- There was a decline in the proportion of grantmaking staff who reported higher levels of agreement with items related to having a clear understanding of the Department's Strategic Goals, from 70 percent to 60 percent. Although more information is needed, a likely explanation for this finding is that at the time the FY 2021 survey was being administered, the Department was in the process of developing a new set of Strategic Goals and strategic objectives. The Department will monitor this estimate in FY 2022 and develop relevant learning opportunities for internal and external colleagues.
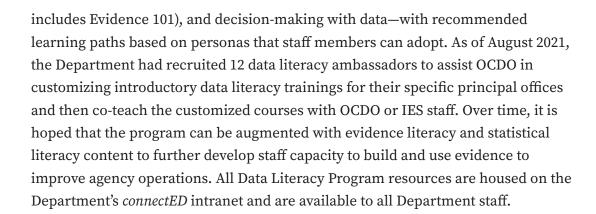
Other Capacity-Building Activities

Highlights of FY 2021 Department activities to support staff capacity to more effectively build and use evidence are as follows:

- The Department offers "Evidence 101" to all new Department staff, which provides a broad overview of the Department's definition of evidence, how evidence is used across the Department's program, key features of the Evidence Act, and concepts related to evidence building.

- Based on emergent evidence observed during the implementation of recent recovery legislation (e.g., *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*), there may be substantial confusion about the Department's evidence levels as well as the statutory and regulatory meaning of "evidence-based." GPO and NCEE are developing resources for internal and external audiences that provide additional guidance on the Department's evidence standards and how they are to be used.

- The Department is developing a logic model template with instructions for use. To complement the template, a logic model scoring rubric, designed to distinguish higher-quality logic models from lower-quality ones, is being refined for use across the Department.

- To support Department staff in more effectively monitoring how grantees are using evidence in the design and operation of their programs, the Department has developed a new section of the standard grantee annual performance report. The new reporting elements ask grantees to identify the evidence-based components of their projects; document those components' implementation, including challenges and successes; detail changes in implementation plans related to evidence-based practices; and report on outputs and outcomes specifically associated with those practices. In addition to providing an opportunity for grantees to reflect upon their practice and document material changes relevant to monitoring the grant, it provides a structured protocol for grant monitors to use during conversations with grantees about their work, use of evidence, and efforts at continuous improvement.

- OCIO and OCDO partnered to begin development of a low-cost, in-depth data science training program modeled after the pilot administered by the Federal Chief Information Officers Council in 2020.

Addressing Data Literacy

One of the most significant activities undertaken during FY 2021 to advance the Department's capacity to build and use evidence was the inauguration of the Department's Data Literacy Program. This project, led by OCDO, is a collaboration between OCDO, IES, and the Office of Human Resources. The program begins with Data Literacy 101 and includes multiple courses in four domains—analytical foundations, communicating with data, data and evidence foundations (which

includes Evidence 101), and decision-making with data—with recommended learning paths based on personas that staff members can adopt. As of August 2021, the Department had recruited 12 data literacy ambassadors to assist OCDO in customizing introductory data literacy trainings for their specific principal offices and then co-teach the customized courses with OCDO or IES staff. Over time, it is hoped that the program can be augmented with evidence literacy and statistical literacy content to further develop staff capacity to build and use evidence to improve agency operations. All Data Literacy Program resources are housed on the Department's *connectED* intranet and are available to all Department staff.

U.S. Department of Education
Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
Secretary

July 8, 2022

Notice of Availability of Alternate Formats

This report is available at http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/index.html. On request, the report also is available in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, or compact disk. For more information, please contact the Department's Alternate Format Center at 1-202-260-0852 or the 504 coordinator via email at om_eeos@ed.gov.

To become connected to the Department through social media, please visit the Department's website at www.ed.gov, Twitter page at @usedgov, and blog at Homeroom.

Notice to Limited English Proficient Persons

If you have difficulty understanding English, you may request language assistance services, free of charge, for the Department by calling 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) or TTY at 1800-877-8339 or by emailing us at Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov.

Please submit your comments and questions regarding this report and any suggestions to improve its usefulness to PIO@ed.gov or write to:

Performance Improvement Officer
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW