June 16, 2007

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
B-300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey:

The organizations below urge you to support the president’s proposed increase of funding for statewide data systems grants through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) in the FY 2009 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill. In FY 2008, this crucial program was funded at $48.3 million. In his FY 2009 budget proposal, President Bush requested a $51.7 million increase for the statewide data systems grants, which brings funding up to $100 million. In a budget proposal that includes few increases, this request is evidence of the significant support for this investment.

This funding is essential to help states improve student achievement and to meet the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act. When states collect the most relevant data and have the ability to follow individual student records from year to year, they can answer the questions at the core of educational effectiveness. In addition to focusing on individual student improvement, longitudinal data makes it possible to determine the effectiveness and quality of specific schools and programs; measure and report accurate graduation rates; identify consistently high-performing schools so that educators and the public can learn from best practices; and evaluate the effect of teacher preparation and training programs on student achievement.

Unfortunately, according to the Data Quality Campaign, only a few states—Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, and Utah—currently have a data system in place with the necessary elements to be of full use to educators and policymakers. Even these states do not have all of the elements for a truly complete P–16 longitudinal data system. The good news is most states are committed to taking the critical steps to develop a strong, practical system; forty-nine states have applied or sent letters of intent for the IES grants. However, funding limitations have only allowed a little over half of all of the states to receive them. The additional $52 million of support requested by the president would help more states to receive larger awards, enabling them to truly diagnose the problems affecting student learning and then lead students to higher academic achievement.

We know that given the right instruction and opportunity, every child can learn. We hope that you agree that this investment in the future of millions of young Americans is critical to the economic and social future of our country. Please help make this possible by funding the statewide data systems grants at $100 million in FY 2009.

Sincerely,

ACT, Inc.                      Learning Point Associates
Alliance for Excellent Education National Association of Secondary School
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Principals
Teacher Education
American Association of State Colleges and National Center for Educational Achievement
Universities
Council of Chief State School Officers PESC - Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council
Education Commission of the States Schools Interoperability Framework Association
Education Trust Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Knowledge Alliance State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA)
State Higher Education Executive Officers