

March 20 – LinkedIn Posts by Ron Wasserstein, Executive Director

As I have previously posted, NCES has been devastated by contract cancellations and massive workforce reductions. It is deeply ironic that the government is abandoning this longtime responsibility in the name of "returning control to the states" when the historical record clearly shows states themselves demanded this federal data collection in the first place.

The government has collected education data for over 160 years. After the civil war, states demanded federal centralization of education data. Several state legislatures directed their senators with resolutions like this one from Kansas in 1867: "Be it resolved by the senate (the house of representatives concurring), That our senators in Congress be instructed, and our representative requested, to favor and urge the establishment of a National Bureau of Education, with headquarters at Washington, with a view to the collection of statistics and other information on general education, and a dissemination of the same."

States wanted greater uniformity and accuracy to enable meaningful comparisons across states. In a communication to the House and the Senate in 1866, the National Association of State and City School Superintendents said federal data collection would make data "more widely available and reliable as educational tests and measures."

Further, the superintendents noted that "few persons who have not been intrusted (sic) with the management of school systems can fully realize how wide-spread and urgent is the demand for such assistance."

This state-requested system evolved into today's NCES, which provides invaluable data used by educators, researchers, and policymakers across the political spectrum. From tracking graduation rates and achievement gaps to monitoring educational access and teacher workforce trends, NCES data informs evidence-based decisions at all levels of government—federal, state, and local.

Some argue that federal data collection represents overreach into state educational sovereignty, but history shows states themselves recognized that standardized, comparable data creates efficiencies, prevents wasteful duplication of efforts, and provides benchmarks that help all states improve their educational systems.

The need for education data is even greater today than in the founding days of what became NCES. There is no sense in which abandoning federal collection of education data improves education or assists states. If there are good reasons for losing this valuable data, they have not been articulated nor has a plan to maintain them without NCES been articulated.

Let's reverse course now. Contact your representatives (<https://cossa.org/action-center/take-action/#/44>) to express concern about NCES funding and staffing cuts and demand transparency about how critical education data will be maintained if NCES functions are eliminated. Our nation's educational future depends on reliable, consistent data—just as state leaders recognized more than 160 years ago.