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**U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, Pensions (HELP) Committee
Staff White Paper on Higher Education Consumer Information**

**Formal Comments from Patrick Riccards,
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As a nation, we have long said that information is power, using the call for greater knowledge to rally support for education. But our educational infrastructure itself has not provided the powerful information we need. Higher education has fallen short in its ability to both capture and apply data that can be used to improve how students learn, how they are taught, and how we measure it.

In presenting the HELP Committee's staff white paper on consumer information, U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander has strongly identified many of the key issues facing data in higher education. Some federally collected data does not serve a purpose for policymakers or consumers, and if it does, the purpose is no longer clear or easy to reach. The federal government lacks key information regarding student success, information necessary for evaluating the success of the very programs the federal government funds. Data collection and preparation has become burdensome for colleges and universities, particularly if said data is not actually put to use. What federal postsecondary data is not used by consumers. And federal data can be manipulated, diminishing its comparability and obscuring transparency.

Volumes upon volumes of research studies can be, and have been, written about problems with data in postsecondary education. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation looks at these issues largely through the lens of our work in teacher preparation and the issues we see in schools of education across the nation. From our perspective the most significant problem—and a real threat to our efforts to recruit, prepare, place, and support excellent teachers in high-need schools (both urban and rural) across the nation—is the lack of key information regarding student success and similar post-graduation indicators.

For the past 70 years, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation has identified and developed the nation's best minds to meet its most critical challenges. This work began in 1945, as the Foundation responded to the significant number of American GIs returning home from World War II with a promise of a higher education under the GI Bill. Then the Foundation helped recruit and prepare the generation of college professors necessary to meet post-war higher education needs. Now the nation's greatest need for education leaders is at the secondary level, particularly in the urban and rural schools that serve so many of America's low-income young people.

By way of background, it is important to understand the work of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. There is little question that effective teacher preparation is a critical challenge for the United States today. Through the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship, the Foundation is attracting, preparing, and helping to retain talented, committed individuals to teach in high-need secondary schools. With programs currently in Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation is working to change the way teachers are prepared. The Foundation partners with colleges and universities to create a more effective teacher education program focused on a yearlong classroom experience, rigorous academic

work, and ongoing mentoring. Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellows will touch the lives of more than a million students over a 15-year teaching career.

Because principals are the second most important influence on teacher effectiveness, after high-quality preparation, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation now offers the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellowship in Education Leadership, a new program that blends transformational education coursework and a tailored business curriculum with intensive clinical experience in schools, corporations, and not-for-profit organizations, as well as involvement with innovative schools abroad. One of the first programs of its kind, the Woodrow Wilson MBA Fellowship is a model for next-generation, results-focused school leader preparation. The program, currently offered in Indiana, New Mexico, and Wisconsin, is designed to prepare leaders who will drive innovation, expand the use of analytics and evidence-based practices, raise student performance to international standards, and improve the quality of school systems and teaching over time.

In looking at any educator preparation program, it is clear that a primary indicator of the effectiveness of academic and clinical preparation is student outcomes. Although the components of teacher and school leader education are important, there is no denying the value of student results. Yes, a strong understanding of the pedagogy is important. Yes, a mastery of the content is essential. But unless it is evident that the pedagogy and content knowledge are translating into both what is taught in a K–12 classroom and what is learned by the children entrusted to the teacher, the efficacy of the preparation can and should be questioned.

This is particularly true for those new to the profession, where student learning outcomes can help identify strengths and weaknesses in teacher preparation, as well as offer important data on the specific ways in which programs should be improved to meet student learning needs.

There is much disagreement on the role of student outcomes in the evaluation of individual teachers. When one considers the hundreds of thousands of students enrolled in teacher education programs each year, millions of dollars spent or borrowed to finance those teacher educations annually, and virtually every public school district turns to those schools of education to provide a pipeline of prospective educators for hire. The price is simply too high for the United States not to do a better job of collecting data on the effectiveness of education school graduates.

Just as parents hold school districts accountable for student achievement, so too should those same districts and the government hold schools of education and other preparation programs accountable for the quality and impact of their graduates. And so should the taxpayer. Whether we are paying taxes or spending taxpayer money, all involved in the higher education process have a right to know if the graduates of a particular school of education are successful as teachers of record, and which school's graduates are not. All have a right to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being directed to those programs that are most successful in preparing excellent teachers who improve student learning AND the measured learning outcomes. And all have a right to know the difference between a successful school of education and a not-so-successful one.

That difference really can only be revealed through the collection, analysis, and utilization of outcome data. It is not enough to know that future teachers entering schools of education bring a certain high school class rank, GPA, or SAT/ACT score into the process. Yes, the inputs are important. But far more important is what they do with those tools. And we cannot measure that impact based simply on academic performance leading to the award of a college degree. It requires post-graduation data that can be tracked back to the degree-granting institution.

Such data points can be just as valuable to prospective college students as they are to policymakers. The choices—both traditional and non-traditional—available to prospective teachers are growing by the year. Imagine the power a prospective student has when he or she not only sees that classmates come from the

upper quartiles of their high school graduating classes, but that graduates from the same program consistently rank among the top performers in the state. Or that almost all graduates of the program are able to secure teaching jobs within 10 miles of campus. Or that three out of every four of these graduates remain in the teaching profession more than five years after graduation. Such information allows for educated consumers. And those educated consumers, with the proper preparation and support, will become the best teachers.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation believes strongly in the need to apply student performance data in evaluating the success of teacher education programs, including its own. In the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship program—now operating in Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, and Ohio—student performance in Fellows’ classrooms is a fundamental metric of our own effectiveness. A recent evaluation of the Woodrow Wilson Michigan Teaching Fellowship, conducted by the American Institutes for Research/CALDER, revealed two key findings:

- Woodrow Wilson Fellows outperformed inexperienced non-Fellows by the equivalent of three to four additional months of pupil growth in middle school science and math; and
- Woodrow Wilson Fellows outperformed same-district non-Fellows, same-district inexperienced teachers, and non-Fellows *from the same universities* in high school math.

While the Foundation has made student outcomes a central component in determining the efficacy of the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships, and while we believe such data is an important metric for all such programs, it is important to note that student outcome data collected in many states is woefully insufficient to measure the success of teacher education programs. Limiting student assessments to just English/language arts and mathematics, even if measured in all grades, simply does not provide adequate data to measure the majority of teachers, particularly those new to the classroom. This is particularly true in the STEM subjects. In most states, student outcome data in the STEM subjects is not available beyond math, biology, and general science, and it is not available from enough grade levels to provide meaningful information about student learning to parents, schools, or teacher preparation programs.

As the Senate HELP Committee continues to debate topics such as gainful employment, it is important that the discussion extend to look at the nation’s success in placing and retaining teacher education graduates in their chosen profession, as well as understanding how well that postsecondary education prepared them to succeed in their career. Nowhere is this more true than in teacher education. As the Committee continues to explore the topic of consumer information and data, it is the Foundation’s hope that careful consideration is given to schools of education. The Committee can provide crucial guidance on how both the data of incoming students and the information gathered once they become teachers can be used to determine the success of our teacher education programs, as well as to improve the field as a whole.

Initial Reaction to Specific Concepts Offered

In reviewing the staff white paper’s “concepts up for debate” in the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation would offer the following considerations, again through its lens of postsecondary teacher preparation:

Concept 1: Eliminate federal data collection on items unrelated to student financing, success, or safety.

Student success data is of the utmost importance for the success of the student, the success of the institution, and the success of our society overall. It is imperative, then, that all collected data be analyzed, disseminated, and applied—all in a timely fashion. Whether it be financing, success, or safety data, we do

our students and our institutions a disservice by delaying data release or parsing it in such a way that it cannot be adequately used to improve operations or outcomes.

Yes, we should eliminate data collection on items that are not currently needed. That allows institutions of higher education to focus on the data sets that matter most to both access and performance. But unless we ensure, and even require, the timely application of data in decision making, data collection of any type is of limited value. In today's data-driven, information economy, the release of "new" data sets that are three or four years old do little good, and can actually hinder reforms and improvements that may already be in place.

Concept 2: Study the current usage of federal postsecondary data and tools by policymakers, prospective students, and families—not researchers—in order to determine what information can be eliminated.

Such study could prove enormously beneficial, both to understanding what currently collected data is being used by policymakers, students, and families as well as what data they may still need to make informed decisions. As part of such study, it is also important to look at how each audience is accessing information, what tools they have found most effective in better understanding postsecondary data, and what they have found absent from the process.

It is equally valuable to survey institutions of higher education and state agencies to get a better sense for the time that goes into data collection and submission, the shortcomings they are experiencing, and how those generating the data can see the value in a robust, open data system that is effectively used by all involved.

Concept 3: Allow third-party organizations that wish to continue data collections and reporting on information identified as no longer in the federal purview to obtain and utilize old federal survey components.

As noted at the outset, information is power. Any steps that can be taken to ensure a thorough review and dissemination of consumer-friendly data should be encouraged. As long as student privacy provisions are enforced, the components and trends available in old federal surveys should be utilized. And third-party organizations should be encouraged to collect additional data to better inform the postsecondary process. In recent years, institutions of higher education have made clear that they recognize that such data collection by third-party organizations is voluntary. When third parties can demonstrate the value—both to the student and the institution—of such research, all parties win.

Concept 4: To prevent overgrowth of data collection in the future, create a subpart of the Higher Education Act to govern data collections and disclosures as well as to keep track of those which are authorized by law.

Such a subpart is already necessary, and with greater and greater emphasis currently placed on student data privacy, such a subpart will be even more important in the future.

Concept 5: Allow the new Outcomes Measures Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Survey that is the result of the 2008 reauthorization to go into place before moving forward on new improvements.

Postsecondary data collection is not an evergreen experience, where a decision made today will hold until the next reauthorization, let alone the next generation of postsecondary students. As technologies and information continue to evolve and grow, it is important that the data survey adapt as well. Such an evolution likely means enacting the new survey now, with continual adjustment and improvement based on feedback from the field.

Concept 6: Require the Department to conduct analysis and public reporting on return on investments in the Federal Student Aid program using existing administrative data in the National Student Loan Data System.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has no official position on this concept.

Concept 7: Redefine federal student data to be more reflective of the broad demographics of those enrolled at higher education institutions.

Just as our economy and our society has evolved over the past 50 years, so too have the demographics of those seeking a postsecondary education. It is only logical that student data sought in 2015 and beyond be more reflective of the types of students currently attending, or considering attending, our nation's postsecondary institutions.

Concept 8: Determine what data can be collected as statistically representative samples and what data requires comprehensive collection.

As part of the study of what data is surveyed and how findings are applied, such determinations make sense.

Concept 9: Rely on third-party data that is not technically federal data in order to evaluate institutional success.

With growing concerns about education data manipulation, it is essential that any data collection and analysis used to evaluate institutional success meets the highest research standards, is conducted by a reputable organization, and is open to public review and scrutiny. Data need not be technically federal data to meet these standards. However, there should be a very high bar for data collection and analysis on the part of non-federal organizations and influence leaders passing judgment on institutions of higher education and their effectiveness.

Concept 10: Utilize existing Bureau of Labor Statistics data to provide average salaries for professions.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has no official stance on this concept, but generally supports any effort that provides high-quality data to education consumers.

Concept 11: Use already collected administrative data with Federal Student Aid to provide student success information regarding aid recipients.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation strongly supports efforts that demonstrate the post-college success of students. It is why we so strongly advocate for linking student learning outcome data to the schools of education that prepared the teachers of record.

Concept 12: Create a student unit record system at the federal level.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation strongly supports this concept. This becomes particularly valuable with the further integration of competency-based education at our colleges and universities. Developing additional data targets and reporting methods regarding the success of former students can strengthen CBE approaches, demonstrating that that metrics used to show mastery are applicable after degree attainment.

Concept 13: Create a national graduate survey to voluntarily collect information from students regarding their careers post-graduation.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation strongly supports this concept, seeing it as another piece of information to help in the identification and preparation of our nation's next generation of leaders.

Concept 14: Consolidate the various access points for federally managed postsecondary information into a single portal housed at the Department with coordination from other interested federal agencies.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation supports efforts to streamline the collection of and access to postsecondary information, a goal of such a portal.

Concept 15: Conduct extensive consumer testing on what information is needed and how it should be presented.

As both the source of and ultimate end user of postsecondary data, it is important that consumers—particularly students—are involved in the development of future data collection or presentation efforts.

Concept 16: Require a single institutional disclosure page for prominent inclusion on college and university websites.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has no formal position on this concept.

Concept 17: Require institutions to prominently place and simplify net-price calculators.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has no formal position on this concept.

Concept 18: Safeguard the federal ban on student level data.

Improved, more robust postsecondary data collection is intended to improve the operations and the outputs of our colleges and universities. Any additional data efforts must respect current privacy laws.

Concept 19: Create an exception under FERPA and allow some new student level data to be collected for all students, including those who do not receive Federal Student Aid, due to the potential power of data in the market.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has no formal position on this concept.

Concept 20: Require any new data collections to be authorized by law, as the department can currently require new data collections from institutions that are not outlined in statute.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has no formal position on this concept.

Concept 21: Prohibit the Department from creating new metrics from federal data without authorization from Congress.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has no formal position on this concept.

Concept 22: Prohibit the Department from regulating to create new metrics, without authorization from Congress.

The Woodrow Wilson Foundation has not formal position on this concept.

Concept 23: Require that any Departmental adjustments to metrics be made public to ensure transparency regarding the result before and after modifications.

While the Woodrow Wilson Foundation has no formal position on this concept, it is a strong advocate for transparency and open data.

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