Discussion Draft

September \_\_\_, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran The Honorable Harold Rogers

Committee on Appropriations Committee on Appropriations

United States Senate United States House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20510 Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski The Honorable Nita Lowey

Committee on Appropriations United State House of Representatives

United States Senate Committee on Appropriations

Washington, D.C. 20510 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Cochran, Senator Mikulski, Representative Rogers, and Representative Lowey:

Our organizations strongly support state and local efforts to use data to support teaching and learning and improve decision-making by schools, school districts and states. School systems’ capacities to achieve this goal grew significantly over the past decade thanks to careful planning by educators and policymakers, but also because of crucial federal leadership and support, including through the State Longitudinal Data Systems program.

As states and districts continue working to strengthen their ability to use and appropriately share data, our organizations are also working to identify and promote policies and practices for better protecting students’ personally identifiable data. This work includes ensuring that educators and other users of student data know how to effectively comply with state and federal privacy laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Building this privacy protection capacity at the state, school district, and school levels is challenging, particularly given states’ approvals of over two dozen new privacy laws in the past 18 months. Additional federal student data privacy requirements are also being considered.

Given these challenges, we strongly support the guidance and technical assistance provided by the Department of Education’s Privacy and Technical Assistance Center (PTAC). PTAC provides invaluable important support to entities tasked with complying with FERPA and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA). As you work with your colleagues to finalize the fiscal year 2016 for the Department of Education, we encourage you to support the Administration’s request for $1 million to strengthen the Department’s ability to provide and expand such assistance. This funding is not only needed to prevent student data privacy problems before they arise, but also to ensure more timely responses to parent and student privacy complaints.

Thank you for carefully considering our request. This relatively small investment will have an outsize impact for students and families by supporting expansion of the PTAC’s proven technical assistance strategies and work.