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The USDOE has undertaken an ambitious project to streamline data collection from states. The Performance-Based Data Management Initiative (PBDMI) has created the Education Data Exchange Network (EDEN) to collect, verify, and store school, district, and state level data that is necessary for basic federal program evaluation. EdFacts, the analytical interface with EDEN data, is designed to give USDOE program officers access to this high-quality information.

PBDMI has been successful in part due to its close collaboration with state education agencies. States have been “partners” in the initiative. This collaborative spirit has been crucial for states to trust that several years of duplicate reporting will lead to a more efficient and effective process and improved data quality.

EDEN collects a great deal of data about schools, such as AYP and improvement status, student performance, school characteristics and programs, student enrollment, student program participation, funding, and staff. This data is relatively simple for states to submit because it is aligned with established federal requirements for reporting to the USDOE and the public. Given NCLB’s focus on reporting student proficiency by subgroup, it is not surprising that EDEN collects subgroup-level student counts in state achievement levels.

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Should the USDOE decide to collect additional or alternative assessment data at the school, district, and state levels for research purposes such as those met by the School-Level Assessment Database, I strongly encourage the agency to collaborate with states and collect this data through EDEN.

Right now, states are making crucial decisions about the development and governance of student-level data systems. The USDOE's Statewide Longitudinal Data System grant program is designed to support state capacity to build and manage data systems that not only meet federal reporting requirements, but support sophisticated analysis for policy, program, and instructional decision-making. I strongly encourage the research and evaluation community to work with state education agencies to insure that these data systems will support high-quality evaluations of federal programs.