



February 20, 2025

The Honorable Tim Walberg  
Chairman  
House Education and Workforce Committee  
2176 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert Scott  
Ranking Member  
House Education and Workforce Committee  
2101 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Walberg and Ranking Member Scott:

AccessLex Institute® is deeply troubled that the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has terminated at least 89 contracts within the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), discontinuing critical research that enables policymakers and schools to make data-driven decisions about how best to allocate scarce resources to most effectively support students. We are especially concerned that ED has halted the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), which is a nationally representative study that measures how students and families pay for college.

AccessLex Institute, in partnership with its nearly 200 nonprofit and state-affiliated ABA-approved member law schools, has been committed to improving access to legal education and to maximizing the affordability and value of a law degree since 1983. The AccessLex Center for Legal Education Excellence® advocates for policies that make legal education work better for students and society alike and conducts research on the most critical issues facing legal education today.

### **Congressional Requirement**

Like many national surveys overseen by ED, NPSAS is required by Congress under the *Education Sciences Reform Act*. Because of this congressional mandate, ED may not unilaterally end implementation of this data collection — the agency is required by law to administer these surveys. Additionally, under its budgetary authority, Congress has appropriated funding to IES to administer NPSAS. If the executive branch does not wish to spend congressionally appropriated funds, it must notify Congress and request a rescission of these funds. Once again, ED may not unilaterally make a decision at odds with the power and authority of another branch of government. We urge you to reach out to ED leadership and impress upon them that they are required by law to administer NPSAS and other surveys mandated by Congress.

## Importance of NPSAS

In addition to being required, NPSAS is also a vital tool for helping stakeholders understand the landscape of higher education financing, including Pell Grants and Direct Loans. Armed with information on college financing, Congress can pass responsive laws, schools can fine-tune their institutional aid programs, and students can get a better sense of the financial obligations related to various higher education options.

NPSAS has been conducted every four years since 1987, resulting in nearly 40 years' worth of data that shows national trends in borrowing, debt levels, grant allocations, and more. In 2018, it was expanded to include an administrative collection that would enable collection of state-level representative data, increasing the utility of NPSAS data for state-based policy decisions. As the only source of nationally representative, student-level data on financial aid, NPSAS can be used to examine several student subgroups of interest, including Pell recipients, veterans, and students with disabilities.

What's more, collecting this data at the national level results in standardized data, allowing for better analysis and understanding of what's happening across both the country and in specific states. If these surveys were left to the states alone, we would have a patchwork of 50 (or less) separate collections that may or may not be comparable and do not account for student enrollment migration across states or virtual learning, leaving meaningful gaps in what we know about how students pay for college. Given the current federal ban on a student-level education data system, there is no existing alternative to NPSAS. As a result, the quadrennial sample survey approach that IES employs for NPSAS is currently the most efficient option for gathering important data on how students and their families finance postsecondary education.

NPSAS also serves as the foundation for two other sample surveys that provide nationally representative, longitudinal data to follow students on their journey throughout postsecondary education. The Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) study follows a cohort of students who are just beginning their postsecondary studies for six years, and the Baccalaureate and Beyond study follows bachelor's degree recipients for 10 years, with a special focus on examining pathways of new teachers. Each of these studies is critical to helping policymakers understand the extent to which investment in higher education yields outcomes well beyond degree attainment. For instance, the IES authored a report titled "Repayment of Student Loans as of 2015 Among 1995–96 and 2003–04 First-Time Beginning Students" using data from the BPS to describe loan repayment across several student characteristics, such as completion of their degree program and Pell Grant receipt.

NPSAS data has been used to produce countless reports within government agencies, nonprofits, and many other constituencies to inform education policy decisions. A few examples of its critical reach include:

- A 2024 Congressional Research Service report providing a primer on the Federal Pell Grant Program;
- A 2024 Congressional Research Service report providing average amounts borrowed among each student loan type within the Direct Loan Program;
- A 2024 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility and use among food insecure college students;

- A 2024 report on student parents in California, authored by the California Alliance for Student Parent Success;
- A 2020 IES report comparing the characteristics of military students who do and do not receive federal veterans' education benefits;
- A 2019 report from the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes on undergraduate enrollment of deaf students in the United States; and
- A 2016 IES report showing trends in Pell Grant Program participation over time.

Without NPSAS, ongoing reporting in these and other important areas will be lost, and any replacement(s) would likely come at an even greater cost to taxpayers.

### **Financial Stewardship and Efficiency**

Finally, the process of meeting congressional requirements by contracting with outside partners shows sound financial stewardship and operational efficiency. IES does not administer NPSAS and other surveys in-house but rather provides contracts to firms with technical expertise in data collection and evaluation. By contracting with external providers, IES is making smart use of taxpayer dollars. Rather than spending time and money on hiring and training a cadre of hundreds of researchers, statisticians, and data scientists, IES is making a more efficient investment by contracting with existing experts in the field.

Additionally, the work related to the contracts that were terminated, including the one funding NPSAS, was in progress. Ending contracts in the middle of projects means that the money spent up to this point has now been wasted. The federal government will not see a return on its investment because the data collection and evaluation has been halted. We urge you to work with ED to reinstate NPSAS, along with other terminated projects, to ensure that federal tax dollars are spent wisely and that stakeholders have robust information in order to make data-informed decisions.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [cchapman@accesslex.org](mailto:cchapman@accesslex.org) or Nancy Conneely, Managing Director of Policy, at [nconneely@accesslex.org](mailto:nconneely@accesslex.org).

Sincerely,



Christopher P. Chapman  
President and Chief Executive Officer