Testimony for House Education and the Workforce Committee
"Strengthening Education Research and Privacy Protections to Better Serve Students"
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Testimony from Neil Campbell
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Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today.

I am the Policy Director for Next Generation Reforms at the Foundation for Excellence in Education. We are an education reform organization that designs and promotes education policy through the development of model policies, implementation strategies, and public outreach.

My work at the Foundation centers on state policies that encourage and support high quality personalized and blended learning. From Course Access policies that help ensure students have access to a range of advanced and elective courses their schools may not be able to offer, to supporting states piloting innovative school models, to developing privacy policies that include strong governance, transparency, and security protections.

The model privacy policy we developed was used as a starting point last year by legislators in Georgia and unanimously passed the state's House and Senate before being signed into law. This new law requires an inventory of data the state collects, accelerates the timing for parents to be able to access and review their child's education record, avoids unnecessary data collection, and requires the development of a data security plan for the state data system.

Effective privacy policies require a delicate balance - finding an intersection that respects parents' desire to protect information about their children, acknowledges the capacity of state and local education agencies, and allows for innovative practices in schools.

That third point about allowing for innovation is critical in two ways:
- First, that teachers and leaders are able to effectively utilize technology in their schools. School systems need to be able to contract with service providers for educational software, online grade books, or parent communications tools that meet their needs and comply with applicable federal and state privacy laws.
- And second, that researchers - after strong review processes and subject to confidentiality and security requirements - are able to access data needed to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and classroom practices.

One of the policies our Foundation has worked on extensively deals with K-3 reading. By the end of third grade, students must make the transition from learning to read to reading to learn. If they aren't ready to do that, it becomes continually more difficult to keep up with the science, history, literature, and even math that their teachers cover in class.

Longitudinal, student level research showed that nearly 90% of students who fail to earn a high school diploma were struggling readers in 3rd grade.

These research based insights served as a basis for efforts like the Annie E. Casey Foundation led Campaign for Grade Level Reading and comprehensive policies in states like Florida, Mississippi, and Colorado to identify struggling readers early, notify parents if children have reading difficulties, and provide intensive interventions and supports.

Without the ability to study student level longitudinal data it would not have been possible to reach the same conclusions and much harder to build the support for early identification and intervention. Researchers could identify the reading difficulties of drop-outs but not that reading in third grade was such a critical gateway for those students.

And without subsequent research, teachers and school leaders would not have critical information needed to improve the reading performance of today's students.
- What interventions are most likely to be successful? For which students?
- When do they need to begin? How long do they need to continue?

As important as research is, we know it is even more important to protect students' privacy. We are pleased to see that proposed updates to the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) work to find this balance and include strong requirements before researchers can access student level data. Requirements that proposals detail the research intent for data and how the confidentiality of data about students will be protected are valuable improvements.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.