# Summary

Across the submitted comments, there is a striking degree of agreement that the Institute of Education Sciences remains a critical national asset, but that it requires substantial modernization to better align research, data, and dissemination with the needs of educators, states, and policymakers. Most commenters do not argue for dismantling IES. Instead, they emphasize reform, coordination, and renewed investment—particularly in data infrastructure, research-to-practice connections, and internal processes.

Taken together, the comments reflect a field that broadly believes in IES's mission, but is asking for it to operate differently: more coordinated, more responsive, more transparent, and more accessible. The dominant message is not "do less," but "do better—and do it in closer partnership with those who use the evidence."

# Top Cross-Cutting Themes

**1. Data Infrastructure and NCES.** Strong consensus across almost all commenters:
- NCES is essential, trusted, and should be preserved and strengthened.
- Core data systems (NAEP, IPEDS, CCD, longitudinal surveys) are widely viewed as:
  - Constitutionally appropriate
  - Critical for civil rights enforcement
  - Foundational for research and policy

Common recommendations:
- Increase NCES staffing and resources – Increase staffing and internal expertise at NCES, reducing overreliance on contractors.
- Concern that recent staffing reductions undermine IES's ability to meet legal obligations, maintain quality, and modernize effectively.
- Improve timeliness and accessibility – Improve timeliness and accessibility through interim data releases, dashboards, and clearer documentation.
- Protect independence and data integrity – Preserve data continuity and transparency, especially when classifications or data collection methods change, to protect longitudinal research.
- Modernize (AI, dashboards, interim releases), but not politicize – Modernize data systems using AI and improved data science capacity—but without sacrificing statistical rigor or independence.
- Stabilize and restore discontinued surveys, especially those serving low-income, first-generation, and special populations.

➡️ This is the strongest area of agreement across ideological lines.

**2. Research-to-Practice Gap**
Very broad agreement among researchers, practitioners, and data users:
- IES research must be more usable, timely, and practitioner-relevant – Many commenters emphasized that IES-funded research often struggles to reach or influence practice, not because of weak quality, but because of misalignment with practitioner needs and timelines.
- Dissemination needs modernization (plain language, dashboards, AI/search optimization, podcasts, technical assistance).

Key ideas:
- Practitioner engagement earlier in the research lifecycle – Engaging practitioners earlier and more meaningfully in shaping research questions.

- Supporting implementation science, translational research, and rapid-cycle studies, especially for emerging challenges.
- Better feedback loops between RELs, grants, and dissemination – Encouraging partnerships between researchers and districts or states as part of grant requirements.
- Supporting replication, cost-effectiveness, and systems-level research to improve applicability.
- Capacity-building for states and districts to use evidence – Expanding technical assistance and capacity-building, particularly through RELs and cooperative agreements.
- Expanding beyond traditional reports to include plain-language summaries, dashboards, videos, podcasts, and practitioner toolkits.
- Reorganizing websites and resources around topics and problems, rather than grants or researchers.
- Improving searchability and optimizing IES products for search engines and AI tools, recognizing how users now access information.
- Investing in communications expertise and knowledge brokerage, not just research production.
- AI was widely viewed as a tool for modernization, but commenters emphasized it must be deployed carefully to protect data quality, privacy, and public trust.

Disagreement is not about the goal, but about how far IES should go toward implementation and technical assistance.

**3. Grantmaking and Peer Review Reform.** Broad agreement that current systems need improvement:
Calls for:
- Faster, more flexible funding
- Better peer review quality control – Improving quality control and oversight of peer review to reduce bias, inconsistency, and non-scientific feedback.
- Reduced bias and clearer standards – Ensuring equitable competition across applicant types and reducing administrative burden and increasing transparency in application and evaluation criteria.
- Support for a wider range of methods (e.g., rapid-cycle, R&D, mixed methods) – Experimenting with new funding models, such as staged grants, rapid-response funding, or pilot programs.

However:
- Some emphasize stronger oversight and enforcement of rigor – Providing clearer reviewer guidance and accountability mechanisms.
- Others emphasize flexibility and innovation

➡ Agreement on change needed, disagreement on directional emphasis.

**4. Dissemination, WWC, and RELs.** This is one of the most contested areas.
*A. What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)*
Support WWC (majority in volume, especially researchers & practitioners):
- Seen as a public good that:
    - Synthesizes evidence practitioners cannot on their own
    - Sets consistent standards of rigor
- Calls for modernization, not elimination – These commenters recommended modernization—more user-friendly formats, clearer cost and implementation guidance, stronger accountability—not elimination.

Oppose WWC (minority, ideologically driven):
- Argues WWC is a federal "truth committee" – Federal evaluation constitutes inappropriate overreach.
- Claims social science is too subjective for federal endorsement.

- Prefers state/private-sector judgment – Decisions about effectiveness should be left to states, parents, and the private sector.

Which side has more support?

- Support for retaining WWC is stronger and broader, especially among:
  o Researchers
  o Measurement experts
  o Practitioners
  o Data users
- Opposition is more categorical but narrower, concentrated among:
  o Conservative think tanks
  o Federal-devolution advocates
- While some commenters focused on protecting rigor, others emphasized flexibility and innovation, but both groups largely agreed that current systems are too slow, opaque, and disconnected from impact.

### B. Regional Education Laboratories (RELs)

Support / Reform RELs (most commenters):

- Value technical assistance, state partnerships, and applied research

Want:

- Better alignment with state needs
- More accountability and feedback loops
- Greater practitioner choice or flexibility

Eliminate RELs (minority):

- Viewed as federal overreach into state decision-making
- Seen as advisory/advocacy rather than neutral research

Balance of support:

- More support for reform than elimination
- Even critics tend to argue RELs are underperforming, not illegitimate

### C. Scope of Federal Evaluation and Policy Guidance

Expansive federal role (dominant among researchers & professional orgs):

- Federal evaluation ensures:
  o Consistency
  o Methodological rigor
  o Equity and civil rights accountability
- Concern that fragmentation would weaken evidence quality

Minimal federal role (ideological minority):

- Federal evaluations seen as political and distorting
- Prefer a "marketplace of ideas" at state/local level
- Argue federal funding biases research agendas

Which side dominates?

- Bigger but accountable federal role has broader support, especially among:
  o Researchers
  o Measurement experts
  o State data users
  o Practitioner-facing organizations

### D. Research Methods (RCTs vs. Mixed / Qualitative)

**AI-Generated Summary of Public Comments to IES RFI ED-2025-IES-0844**
**Generated by Betsy Wolf**

Moderate disagreement within the research community:
- Some emphasize:
  o RCTs and causal rigor as the "gold standard"
- Others argue for:
  o Mixed methods
  o Qualitative and implementation science
  o Systems-level and interdisciplinary research

This is a methodological debate, not ideological:
- Most agree on maintaining rigor
- Disagreement is about pluralism vs. hierarchy of methods

**5. Aligning Work Across IES Centers and Breaking Down Silos**
Another widely shared recommendation is that IES should operate more cohesively across its four centers (NCES, NCER, NCSER, NCEE). Multiple commenters independently argued that the current structure reinforces silos that weaken impact. Common, overlapping proposals included:
- Establishing shared strategic priorities that guide data collection, research funding, evaluation, and technical assistance.
- Creating formal feedback loops, where practitioner needs identified through RELs or technical assistance inform grant priorities, and new research findings feed directly into dissemination and support efforts.
- Using common measures and shared infrastructure across centers to reduce duplication and increase coherence.
- Improving central leadership and governance capacity so IES can better coordinate internally and exert greater control over grantmaking and contracting.

**Differences in Responses by Audience Type**
Researchers & Professional Associations
- Strongly pro-IES
- Emphasize:
  o Rigor
  o NCES independence
  o Measurement quality
  o Sustained federal investment
  o Favor reform, not retrenchment

Practitioners & District Voices
- Want:
  o Usable evidence
  o Faster feedback
  o Implementation guidance
  o Capacity-building
- Generally supportive of WWC, RELs, and technical assistance

Advocacy & Equity-Oriented Groups
- Focus on:
  o Disaggregated data
  o Longitudinal surveys
  o Accountability for federal programs
- Strongly opposed to cuts to data and research capacity

Ideological / Think Tank Commenters

- Skeptical of federal authority
- Favor:
    - Data collection only
    - Elimination of evaluative and advisory functions
    - More absolutist, less focused on operational reform