To: Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education
From: Alliance for Excellent Education
Date: February 28, 2017
RE: Docket ID Number ED–2016-ICCD-0147: Comments on Agency Information Collection Activities; Comment Request; Mandatory Civil Rights Data Collection

The Alliance for Excellent Education (the Alliance) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Office of Civil Rights's (the OCR's) request for comments on the mandatory Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). The Alliance strongly supports the CRDC in its current form—in particular that participation is mandatory and that data is disaggregated by all student subgroups—and believes that the information collected is essential to the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) mission and to advancing educational excellence and equity at the federal, state, and local levels. Below are the Alliance's comments to question 1 in the request for comments and the directed questions in Attachment A-5 regarding access to internet.

<u>**Request for Comment**</u>

Question 1: Is this collection necessary to the proper functions of ED?

The CRDC is a crucial tool for revealing disparities in access to educational opportunities. The core mission of ED is to "foster educational excellence and ensure equal access." Such efforts must begin with information about how students are doing in schools across the country, which allows ED—along with leaders in states, districts, and schools; parents; advocates; and members of the public—to understand better which students are succeeding and growing and which students are struggling so they can make informed decisions about programs and policies that are working and how best to use limited resources. Thus, the CRDC supports the most critical functions of ED as a promoter of educational equity and enforcer of the civil rights of the nation's children, and allows other policymakers and community leaders to do the same. The Alliance urges ED to continue to conduct and strengthen the CRDC biennially and consider how the CRDC can be conducted on an annual basis.

<u>**Attachment A-5**</u>

Access to internet: Are there other data about connectivity that OCR should consider collecting to gauge access disparity?

The Alliance supports ED's efforts to collect information about access to internet and agrees with the equity concerns set forth by ED in the attachment, specifically that school districts, and schools within districts, do not have equitable access to high-speed internet. A 2013 report commissioned by the Alliance reveals substantial gaps in access for African American students, Latino students, students from low-income families, and students from rural areas. Students in these categories are more likely to be in schools with slow internet access (10 Mbps or less) than their peers and less likely to be in schools with high-speed internet.[1]

More specifically, the report concludes the following inequities:

- Racial inequity: Students of color were more likely than white students to have slow internet access at their schools.
- Income inequity: Students from low-income families were nearly twice as likely as students from affluent families to have slow internet access at their schools.
- Rural inequity: Students in rural America were more than twice as likely as students in urban/suburban areas to have slow internet access at their schools.[2]

As inequitable access to essential technology has the potential to further exacerbate gaps in educational opportunity, it should certainly be a subject of inquiry in the CRDC.

ED proposed to inquire specifically about the "amount of school bandwidth in megabits per second." Instead, the Alliance suggests collecting the following three types of information to parse out more accurately the level and type of internet access available in schools and districts:

1. Amount of bandwidth (in megabits per second) that the school or school district has in connecting to an internet service provider (ISP) for general internet access.

2. Amount of bandwidth (in megabits per second) that the school or school district has for wide area networking (WAN) connectivity between district buildings.

3. Amount of bandwidth (in megabits per second) that each school typically has inside each classroom in the school building including wired and wireless (Wi-Fi) capability.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. The Alliance is available to provide additional information or answer questions.

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[1] J. Horrigan, *Schools and Broadband Speeds: An Analysis of Gaps in Access to High-Speed Internet for African American, Latino, Low-Income, and Rural Students* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education and LEAD Commission, 2014).
[2] Ibid.