

June 19, 2025



RE: Annual Survey of School System Finances
Docket Number USBC-2025-0004

Dear Mr. Thomas Smith,

On behalf of American Experiment, a public policy organization based in Minnesota, I am writing in support of retaining the Annual Survey of School System Finances. As an education policy fellow, my work primarily focuses on research and data collection involving education finances. In Minnesota, education is the largest expenditure in the state budget. Given that this is the case in most other states as well, taxpayers deserve annual, standardized financial data to evaluate how those dollars are being spent and whether they are producing results.

Schools and districts record their finance data in uninterpretable formats that, in many states, are inaccessible to the public unless requested under public records law. I have personally experienced this throughout my years of work as a researcher.

The U.S. Census Bureau's Annual Survey of School System Finances is one of the only consistent data sets that gives state-level information about school system spending. Again, in my experience, it has been an invaluable data point in assessing the return on investment for education when cross-referenced with outcomes data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and others.

The data could be more useful if its release was timelier. While it may be necessary to lag data reporting about two years behind the current year for administrative reasons, for public policy organizations and other interested groups, timelier data release would make the data more newsworthy.

Reporting the Annual Survey's data in spreadsheets is excellent for data analysis. The Census Bureau could also consider supplementing with interactive dashboards to help the public hold school systems more accountable for how they use public funds.

Not only does the Annual Survey's education data inform state-based efforts pertaining to financial transparency and accountability, but because of its uniform and comparable data sets, it can be used to look at the activity of one state to another as well.

American Experiment is hopeful the Annual Survey of School System Finances will continue given its far-reaching benefits and years of helpful data.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catrin Wigfall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Catrin" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and "Wigfall" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. The ink is a vibrant blue, and the background is a light, neutral color.

Catrin Wigfall

Policy Fellow

American Experiment

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