



National Board for Education Sciences

JULY 2013 THROUGH JUNE 2014

2014 NBES ANNUAL REPORT

July 2013 through June 2014

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CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Ensuring that America's schools are equipped with the knowledge needed to prepare students academically and socially to be college and career ready is one of our nation's most important responsibilities. Advancing educational effectiveness depends on developing knowledge of what policies, practices and innovations work and under what circumstances they are most beneficial. This knowledge is essential to ensure that our schools, colleges, and universities are safe, productive, and effective environments for learning and development.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES), established in 2002, provides rigorous and relevant evidence on which to ground education practice and policy and share this information broadly. As the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education, IES has developed a reputation for creating a trustworthy, non-partisan infrastructure for education research. The accomplishments of IES are numerous and will continue to have positive impacts on the lives of students as well as many other parts of our society. According to a recent GAO report (GAO, 2013), IES has "transformed the quality and rigor of research within education and increased demand for scientifically based evidence of effectiveness in the education field as a whole. The IES research agenda is informed by the National Board for Education Science (NBES). The NBES includes voices and interests of practitioners and researchers who advise IES leadership about the most important questions and issues relevant to research in education.

During the past year, the NBES has focused on examining the priorities and processes established by IES, providing targeted feedback to the IES Director and Commissioners regarding ways in which IES may improve its impact and relevance. Additionally, the NBES has advocated with Congress for changes in the *Education Sciences Reform Act* that would continue to support strong research, development, training, and evaluation in Education while strengthening processes for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of IES. Moreover, as reflected in this report, the NBES has continuously reviewed the manner in which IES communicates research findings, examined specific lines of research to identify ways to improve relevance to teachers and schools, and discussed specific priorities to determine ways to maximize the impact of limited funding. All NBES efforts are aimed at improving the effectiveness of IES to create evidence for improving educational outcomes for our nation's schoolchildren.

The NBES believes that IES continues to be an effective agency for developing objective findings that inform the broad field of education. With enhanced legislation and increased funding levels, IES's impact will continue to grow.

David J. Chard, Ph.D.

Leon Simmons Endowed Dean and Professor of Teaching and Learning
Simmons School of Education and Human Development
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, TX

I. INTRODUCTION

The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-279) created the National Board for Education Sciences (NBES) to serve as an advisory board to the Director of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education.

Purpose of This Report

Among the duties listed in the Education Sciences Reform Act, the Board is required to submit to the Director of IES, the Secretary of Education, and the appropriate congressional committees not later than July 1 of each year:

...a report that assesses the effectiveness of the Institute in carrying out its priorities and mission, especially as such priorities and mission relate to carrying out scientifically valid research, conducting unbiased evaluations, collecting and reporting accurate education statistics, and translating research into practice. (Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, 20 U.S.C. § 116 (e)).

This report constitutes the Board's 2014 assessment of IES's effectiveness in carrying out its priorities and mission, based on the Board's meetings and deliberations from July 2013 through June 2014. It should be noted that the Board met only twice during this annum. The October meeting of the board was cancelled due to the federal government shutdown. Consequently, this report reflects content and deliberations from the meeting in January 2014 and June 2014.

On September 10, 2013, then NBES Board Chair, Dr. Bridget Terry Long, Academic Dean and Xander Professor of Education and Economics at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, provided testimony to the Committee on Education and the Workforce in the U.S. House of Representatives (see Appendix C). As part of a hearing entitled Education Research: Exploring Opportunities to Strengthen the Institute of Education Sciences, Dr. Long summarized on behalf of the Board our support for the important advances IES has made in carrying out its priorities and mission of providing rigorous and relevant evidence about education and making that information broadly available to critical stakeholders. Some specific commendations included:

- IES provides the foundations of factual information and research with the collection of clear, consistent, high-quality data through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).
- IES serves as a repository and distribution center of research, both studies funded by IES and those that are not. Importantly, IES stands as the best authority of rigorous research free from the many influences present in the education space.
- IES has pushed the field to adopt a higher standard of evidence, insisting on the use of randomized control trials (RCTs) and has established rigorous peer review panels for reviewing grant proposals.
- IES called for researchers to be accountable to external audiences for how the findings for one set of schools might be applicable to another set of schools. Additionally, IES has emphasized the importance of partnerships between researchers and practitioners aimed at increasing the relevance of educational research to school practice.

Additionally, Dr. Long's testimony highlighted key recommendations that the board had for reauthorization of the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA, P.L. 107-279). Specific recommendations included:

- Establishing a requirement that the IES Director submit a biennial plan of activities to the Board for advice. Currently, the IES Director is only required to submit his or her priorities to the Board every

six years. Although the Board has many informal opportunities to provide feedback to the Director based on the strong working relationship between the current Board and current Director, the expectation of more frequent formal feedback should be documented

- Changing the term of a Board member to commence from the date of confirmation so that members have a full four years of service
- Automatically extending by one year the terms of Board members whose successors have not yet been appointed; this would help to ensure that the Board always has a sufficient number of members to be effective
- Giving the Board hiring and evaluation authority over the NBES Executive Director to ensure this role is independent of IES given the assessment duties of the Board
- Allowing for flexibility in the pay of the IES Director and Commissioners by making these positions eligible for “critical pay” under the Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004
- Removing privacy protection for individual schools in data reports, a protection that does not exist in any other federal statute or regulation. The current prohibition on revealing school identity means that useful information must be omitted from evaluation reports

Subsequent to her testimony, Drs. Long, Chard, and Loeb met with members of House staff to discuss these and other specific recommendations that were adopted as part of the mark-up of ESRA for reauthorization.

This report reflects discussions and deliberations that occurred in our effort to support IES to continue to expand on its activities to support and communicate rigorous and relevant education research.

The remainder of this section provides information on the Board membership and meetings during 2013-14 that produced this report.

Membership of the Board

The National Board for Education Sciences consists of up to 15 presidentially appointed and Senate-confirmed members who “shall be highly qualified to appraise education research, statistics, evaluations, or development....” Each member may serve up to two consecutive 4-year terms.

Current Members

As of June 1, 2014 the Board consists of 13 voting members:

Chair: Dr. David J. Chard, Ph.D.

Dean, Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development
Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX
Term expires November 28, 2015

Vice Chair: Dr. Susanna Loeb, Ph.D.

Barnett Family Professor of Education Stanford
University, Stanford, CA
Term expires March 15, 2016

Dr. Anthony S. Bryk, Ed.D.

President
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Stanford, CA
Term expires November 28, 2015

Dr. Darryl J. Ford, Ph.D.

Head of School for William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Term expires November 28, 2016

Dr. Larry V. Hedges, Ph.D.

Board of Trustees, Professor of Statistics and Social Policy, Institute for Policy Research
Northwestern University, Evanston, IL
Term Expires November 28, 2015

Dr. Adam Gamoran, Ph.D.

John D. MacArthur Professor of Sociology and Educational Policy Studies, Director of the
Wisconsin Center for Education Research
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI
Term expires November 28, 2015

Dr. Robert C. Granger, Ed.D.

President
The William T. Grant Foundation, New York, NY
Term expires November 28, 2014

Dr. Kris D. Gutiérrez, Ph.D.

Professor of Literacy and Learning Sciences and Inaugural Provost's Chair School of
Education, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO
Term expires November 28, 2016

Dr. Margaret R. "Peggy" McLeod, Ed.D.

Educational Consultant, Washington, DC
(former Executive Director for Student Services, Alexandria City Public Schools, Alexandria, VA)
Term expires November 28, 2016

Dr. Judith Singer, Ph.D.

James Bryant Conant Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Term expires November 28, 2014

Dr. Bridget Terry Long, Ph.D.

Xander Professor of Education and Economics
Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA
Term expires November 28, 2016

Dr. Robert A. Underwood, Ed.D.

President, University of Guam, Hagatna, GU
Term expires November 28, 2016

Dr. Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Ph.D.

Walter H. Gale Professor of Education and Academic Dean, Harvard
Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA
Term expires November 28, 2015

Ex Officio Members

The Board has nine non-voting, ex officio members. The ex officio members of the Board are:

Dr. John Q. Easton, Ph.D.

Director, Institute of Education Sciences; Acting Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics

Dr. Ruth Nield, Ph.D.

Commissioner, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance

Dr. Joan McLaughlin, Ph.D.

Commissioner, National Center for Special Education Research

Dr. Tom Brock, Ph.D.

Commissioner, National Center for Education Research

Dr. Alison Aughinbaugh, Ph.D.

Designate for Dr. Kevin Hall, Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Dr. Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Ph.D.

Designate for Dr. Subra Suresh, Director, National Science Foundation

Dr. Robert Kominski, Ph.D.

Designate for Dr. Robert Groves, Director, U.S. Census Bureau

Dr. Brett Miller, Ph.D.

Designate for Dr. Alan Guttmacher, Director, National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

It should be noted that there are currently only eight ex-officio members as Director Easton is also serving as Acting Commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics.

NBES Meetings, July 2013 through June 2014

The Board met on January 13, 2014 and on June 16, 2014. Due to the temporary government shut-down in 2013, the board did not meet in October of 2013.

Agendas from the two meetings covered by this report appear in Appendices A and B. Additionally the minutes of these meetings are available at: <http://ies.ed.gov/director/board/minutes/index.asp>.

- The January 13, 2014 meeting included sessions on improving IES in light of the NBES Chair's report to the House Committee Hearing and the report of the Government Accounting Office. It also included the status of the evidence on supporting English learners and post-secondary topics covered by the What Works Clearinghouse.
- The June 16, 2014 meeting featured sessions on IES's pre-doctoral and post-doctoral training

programs in the National Center for Education Research and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) and on NCSER's investments in research specific to Response to Intervention Models used in schools.

II. NATIONAL EDUCATION CENTER UPDATES AND BOARD RESPONSES

The statutory duties of the Board include:

To review and regularly evaluate the work of IES, to ensure that scientifically valid research, development, evaluation, and statistical analysis are consistent with the standards for such activities under this title. (Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, 20 U.S.C. § 116 (b)(7)).

The Board currently operates as a “committee of the whole” in reviewing the activities of the four National Education Centers: the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), the National Center for Education Research (NCER), the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER), and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). At every Board meeting the Commissioners from each of the centers update the Board on activities within their centers. At times the Board will ask a Commissioner to present at greater length on important issues related to that center. The following summarizes these presentations and the Board's comments and responses from the January 13, 2014 and June 16, 2014 meetings.

At the June 16, 2014 meeting of the Board, Dr. Easton announced that he would be leaving IES on August 31, 2014, to become a Distinguished Senior Fellow at the Spencer Foundation. On behalf of the Board, Dr. Chard acknowledged Dr. Easton's wonderful service to schools and educators, as well as his dedication to maintaining the integrity of IES, promoting innovation, and seeking ways to make research more applicable to schools and classrooms. He invited comments from other members of the Board.

Robert Granger, Ed.D, praised Dr. Easton for building on the foundation of the previous IES director and seeking to make IES's work more relevant to policymakers and practitioners. Bridget Terry Long, Ph.D., said Dr. Easton's efforts have helped improve the quality of education research. She also appreciated his emphasis on partnerships and two-way communication between researchers and practitioners. Speaking as a practitioner, Peggy McLeod, Ed.D. thanked Dr. Easton for his leadership. Adam Gamoran, Ph.D., appreciated how Dr. Easton preserved the best efforts of the previous IES director, engaged the education research community, and recruited talented people to staff IES.

Updates from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

January 2014 and June 2014 NCES Updates to the Board

John Q. Easton, Ph.D., IES Director, NCES Acting Commissioner

Dr. Easton said he volunteered to take on the role of acting director because NCES recently underwent a major reorganization, completed in March, 2014, that involved adding a new unit to collect ED*Facts* data. The goal was to integrate the ED*Facts* effort into the NCES and create parallel processes for data gathering across the Center. ED*Facts* collects a lot of important data that are used for sample frames for NCES' large studies. Typically, data collection and release is very slow, but new efforts at NCES are speeding up data release. In addition, NCES took the lead on the ED Data Inventory, which combines data from 33 major data collection efforts.

NCES is prolific, said Dr. Easton; data are released frequently and refreshed online as soon as possible. NCES recently put out data on preschool enrollment that included important, useful, up-to-date information on school crime and safety, including postsecondary data, relevant to current issues. Recent

data on high school graduation and dropout rates presented 2 years of data on both the averaged freshman graduation rate and a new adjusted cohort graduation rate. The graduation statistic received a fair amount of press because it showed an 80% graduation rate.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is transitioning to technology-based assessments, with the goal of having NAEP computer-administered by 2017. In support of a Presidential initiative, My Brother's Keeper, to improve opportunities for boys and young men of color, NCES played a large role in finding high-quality data on race and gender in a very short time frame.

Upcoming releases include data from NCES' first-time participation in both the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Financial Literacy study and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD's) Teaching and Learning International Study (TALIS). For TALIS, NCES did not obtain a sufficient response rate to be included in the OECD average, but the U.S. results will still be included in the report.

Board comments and response to Director Easton's presentation

Dr. Gamoran asked whether NAEP has succeeded in convening an advisory committee of principals. Dr. Easton reported that NAEP has had much improved participation rates for the past 4–6 years, including very high participation in the 12th-grade NAEP. Under the No Child Left Behind Legislation, states are required to participate in some NAEP assessments. Historically, overall participation in 12th-grade NAEP reached a low of about 55%, but is now up to 70%, reflecting better planning and activities around participation.

Dr. Granger said that practitioners are not always confident that the research data they receive reflects the contexts in which they work. He asked whether NCES data will move toward describing not just how well kids are doing, but the correlates of how well they are doing (such as the communities where they live). He also asked whether data about student context are likely to be incorporated into data collection, and, if so, whether they will be transparent enough for analysts to use. Dr. Easton said NAEP has been rethinking "context variables"—information provided by students via a background questionnaire—and the information is publicly available using an excellent tool provided by NAEP. He confirmed that users could search the data to find, for example, the percentage of students eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program in Rochester, NY.

Larry V. Hedges, Ph.D., emphasized the importance of coordinating contextual data from individual studies with population-based data so that the same variables are measured in the same way.

Updates from the National Center for Education Research (NCER) and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE)

Thomas Brock, Ph.D., NCER Commissioner, and Joan McLaughlin, Ph.D., NCSE Commissioner

Dr. Brock and Dr. McLaughlin presented updates on their respective Centers jointly because the two work so closely together.

- Dr. Brock said that NCER will formally announce all of its funded grants for 2014 by July 1, 2014. NCER is now funding an additional competition for FY 2014 to create an R&D center focused on programs for gifted and talented children and youth. The effort addresses the lack of information about the effectiveness of such programs.
- Dr. Brock expressed optimism that NCER would have more grant funding available for FY 2015 because some of its programs are ending. Among the 2015 competitions are three new R&D centers:

1. Knowledge Utilization, which would address how to make research more useful to practitioners
 2. Standards in Schools, which would look at how new college- and career-readiness standards are implemented and how they affect students
 3. Virtual Learning, which would focus on technology, such as online tools for rapid experimentation and working with large datasets
- Dr. McLaughlin reminded the Board that NCSER made no awards in 2014 because the budget only allowed for funding continuing grants. In FY 2015, NCSER will fund two research competitions, one on primary research in special education and one focused on training, early career development, and mentoring. If NCSER receives the same level of funding for 2015 as for 2014, it will not be able to fund all of the high quality applications it receives.
 - For 2015, NCER and NCSER are undertaking a significant redesign of their Request for Applications (RFAs). For example, the RFA and submission guide will be merged, so that potential applicants can more easily search one document and find what they need. Also, all requirements are now clearly labeled and distinguished from items that represent advice from program officers. Additionally, new RFAs will also encourage applicants to consider and discuss the contextual factors that influence their hypotheses and findings. Specifically, the R&D center on statistical research methodology calls out the need to clarify variables and context.
 - NCER and NCSER are developing a customer satisfaction survey of current grantees. It will solicit feedback on the quality and usefulness of technical assistance and information provided by IES staff and the IES website. The survey will also solicit perceptions about the content and format of the annual principal investigators' meeting.

National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance

Ruth Curran Neild, Ph.D., NCEE Commissioner

- Dr. Neild reported that IES is still reworking its website and the project is on track for completion in early 2015. The website includes more than 30,000 pages overall.
- NCEE recently released a guide for researchers and policymakers (and a smaller piece intended for school districts) on identifying and conducting opportunistic experiments in education. The guide uses plain language to describe processes and answer common questions about experiments.
- Dr. Neild reported on the Open Data initiative, an international effort to make more public information freely available and accessible. Efforts to create a bridge between the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) and other agencies' clearinghouses have been limited because each Department's clearinghouse serves different audiences with different purposes.
- Dr. Neild noted that the Open Data initiative would involve a common organizational framework and description of its contents. The recent Presidential initiative, My Brother's Keeper, uses third parties that are combining information from multiple clearinghouses for a given audience. These models suggest ways that the WWC can open up its data to the public, allow users to drill down, and possibly encourage the field to take new approaches to using and evaluating the data (e.g., meta-analysis). Dr. Neild sought the Board's input on whether NCEE should pay special attention to a particular type of variable or issue and also sought input on potential consequences of the Open Data initiative.

Discussion

- Dr. Long cautioned NCEE to consider terminology in its policies as Open Data in this initiative doesn't refer to data on individuals but on citations. Dr. Long asked whether NCEE is working with major journals, which are also considering how to make their data available and searchable. Dr. Neild clarified that "open data" applies to any information the government holds. The current approach allows some process data to be available in WWC, for example, while other data are "behind a wall."
- Dr. Singer suggested that before building a new framework, NCEE and others should talk with the potential clients about their needs. Dr. Neild said she envisions outside parties coming up with new ways to use the data.
- Dr. Granger said this approach would be very useful to policymakers and practitioners seeking specific data about whether an intervention would work in a given setting. A better framework would allow analysis of factors at the individual, organizational, and community level, so information from government records is needed and is not often currently provided.
- Dr. Hedges noted the recurring theme of contextual data and the importance of measuring associated variables. The framework could be a catalyst for change in the collection of data, especially population data. Dr. Hedges asked whether Dr. Neild is proposing to make coding data available for studies that do and do not meet standards for inclusion. Dr. Neild said that the issue had not yet been addressed, although her first instinct would be to make all information available, regardless of whether it meets standards. She added that the clearinghouses have some features in common, and the focus would be on creating a common framework about the contents.
- Dr. Long pointed out that the WWC is expanding its categorization, and coding is complicated. Dr. Neild responded that NCEE created a new guide for study authors that uses a two-page template to describe the necessary components for including a study in the WWC, and it is available online.
- Dr. Hedges suggested NCEE consider harmonizing with major international investments, such as the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) Statement. Dr. Bryk said the data in the current format for the WWC would not be useful for identifying the level of specificity that has been requested. Dr. Neild said some information can be pulled out of studies and put into a database while the WWC is reviewing the studies. Dr. Granger said he believed that researchers would begin to provide more context if journals and clearinghouses asked for the information (e.g., details about research subjects), if funders required it, and if mechanisms were available to make it easier to do. Dr. Hedges added that the availability of a checklist can influence how people collect data.

III. IES'S RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

IES's mission is to provide rigorous and relevant evidence on which to ground education practice and policy and to share this information broadly. IES's funded research is a large part of its mission, and one of the Board's goals is to assist IES in maximizing the impact of its funded research.

Research Funded by NCER and NCSE

The Board's statutory duties include:

To advise the Director on the establishment of activities to be supported by the Institute, including the general areas of research to be carried out by the National Center for

In keeping with this responsibility, the Board has engaged in many discussions related to IES's research portfolio. The Board commends IES on its effectiveness since its establishment in 2002. IES is widely recognized for having increased both the quality of and resources available for education research. Evidence like that supplied by IES-supported research is essential to improving the educational attainment of all of America's young people.

Presentation by Dr. Tom Brock, Commissioner, NCER and IES-Funded researchers focused on the support of English Language Learners

During the January 2014 Board meeting, the discussion provided insights on findings related to funded studies on English Language Learners. Dr. Sean Reardon of Stanford University discussed his findings conducted with the Stanford University and San Francisco Unified School District study. In particular he discussed the outcomes with regard to Chinese and Spanish speakers. English proficiency trajectories varied between the two groups in that Chinese English language learners are more likely to be reclassified by fifth-grade than are Spanish speakers. The outcome of the study could not be explained readily; however, some concerns were that the IES research standards were difficult to meet within the context of the school district research partnership. Dr. Reardon also indicated that more time with partner schools is needed to ensure that data can be used for analysis.

Ms. Gabrielo Uro, from the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) provided a national perspective on English language learners (ELL's) and articulated that there is a variance on how English-language learners are counted by states. Although all states are required to measure English language proficiency, they have a variety of assessments to do so. Therefore, the definition of proficiency varies across states. Thus far, their research shows that some programs impacted advanced level students positively, but had limited impact on those with lower levels of proficiency. The objective of continued research for the CGCS would be to determine how to capture more data on achievement. Further, Ms. Uro insisted that national research would be helpful on the growing numbers of ELLs who are in need of special education services.

Ms. Eileen De Los Reyes, Deputy Superintendent for academics from Boston public schools, shared that the number of students designated as ELL in 2009 skyrocketed because of a different assessment structure. She expressed that there is still a concern about a leveling off of performance around the third grade and that some children are having less successful trajectories if they enroll after kindergarten. In addition, some students will transfer to sixth grade (middle school) without having achieved the appropriate proficiency.

Funding Table: NCER AND NCER

National Center for Education Research		
	2013	2014
New Awards	\$20,744,784	\$42,454,771
Continuations	\$131,029,221	\$104,650,288
Total NCER Grant Budget	\$151,774,005	\$147,105,059

National Center for Special Education Research

	2013	2014
New Awards	\$9,842,092	\$151,396
Continuations	\$36,968,570	\$52,504,224
Total NCSER Grant Budget	\$46,810,662	\$52,655,620

Discussion

In general, board members expressed concerns that there lacks a successful trajectory for ELL students with disabilities. Dr. Easton suggested looking at the tools and models to make findings more generalizable. There were also discussions about NCSER sharing findings from their study with the Boston Public School System so that it can better understand interventions for ELLs with disabilities.

IV. IMPORTANT RESEARCH TOPICS IDENTIFIED BY THE BOARD

The Board's statutory duties include:

...to recommend to the Director topics that require long-term, sustained, systematic, programmatic, and integrated research efforts... (Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, 20 U.S.C. § 116(b)(9)).

The Board commends IES for doing much to address identified needs in education research and encourages IES to continue building on those efforts. Over the course of several years, the Board has discussed repeatedly the importance of understanding the science of implementation. The Board has also consistently noted that it is problematic to search for "what works" without identifying the context in which specific practices and policies work and for whom. A particular area of research that the Board discussed during the 2013-14 meetings is the implementation of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in the context of College and Career Readiness Standards. The Board's intent in discussing this topic was to better understand the investment that has been made by NCSER in a particular line of research. This line of research is particularly relevant to schools and their implementation of specific policies and practices related to improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

Dr. McLaughlin, Commissioner of NCSER, explained that MTSS have already made a great impact and have great potential for special education; however, she noted that more research is needed to understand:

- How best to implement MTSS
- How to support and train schools and teachers in implementation
- What constitutes good Tier 1 instruction
- What Tier 2 and 3 interventions should look like as the intensity increases
- How interventions should be delivered
- How children should be monitored to facilitate easy transitions through tiers
- Whether children should move through tiers in a stepwise fashion.

Since 2006, NCSER has invested \$136 million in research via 63 awards, mostly on assessment and training around MTSS in the fields of reading, math, social skills, and behavior. Four grantees were invited to present their work to the Board in the following areas:

- Developing and validating screening and progress monitoring tools
- Supporting the development and testing of multiple tiers of instruction
- Providing tools for school personnel to help make decisions on tiered instruction

The Board invited Dr. Sandra Chafouleas from the University of Connecticut, Dr. Deborah Simmons from Texas A&M University, Dr. Lynn Fuchs from Vanderbilt University, and Dr. Robert Horner from the University of Oregon to describe their IES-funded research on MTSS.

Assessing Core Behavioral Competencies within Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Sandra M. Chafouleas, Ph.D., Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut

Dr. Chafouleas pointed out that behavioral assessment traditionally takes a long time, involves multiple perspectives, varies depending on the construct of interest, and lacks a “gold standard” for comparison. Her research team set out to create a tool for behavior assessment within MTSS that would be defensible (i.e., valid), efficient (and easy to use), flexible (i.e., can be modified for individual children), and repeatable (frequently, for progress monitoring).

Dr. Chafouleas and colleagues modeled their Direct Behavior Rating (DBR) scale on the visual pain scale created by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The DBR targets three core behaviors that every student should display to access instruction: academic engagement, respectfulness, and the absence of disruptive behavior. Research findings indicate that the DBR tool is useful for monitoring class-wide and individual behavior and assessing the effects of an intervention. Dr. Chafouleas and colleagues are now looking at the broader landscape of behavioral assessment to study their use and effectiveness.

Tier 2 (WHERE IS TIER 1 DEFINED?) Early Reading Intervention: What To Do When We Have Them in Tiers?

Deborah Simmons, Ph.D., Texas A&M University

Dr. Simmons described studies assessing Tier 2 reading instruction for students who have not made adequate progress under Tier 1 (general) instruction. Specifically, she and her colleagues evaluated the Early Reading Intervention (ERI) for kindergarten students at risk of reading difficulties or disabilities. Dr. Simmons emphasized that the studies aim to determine not just whether ERI works, but how to intervene effectively when students are sorted into instructional tiers.

Dr. Simmons said it is still not clear who should deliver Tier 2 instruction, but there is strong evidence that it can prevent early difficulties with reading from becoming intractable barriers. She presented the findings from two studies comparing ERI with a school-designed intervention that aimed to reveal whether ERI works in real-world settings, whether the effects last, and whether data can be used to improve the intervention.

Reading instruction using a response-to-intervention (RTI) approach uses data to adjust the intervention in response to student performance. A third study evaluated the ERI among a group of kindergarten students who demonstrated low reading performance with and without periodic adjustments (experimental and conventional groups, respectively). The experimental group performed better than the conventional group on all measures, and the gains lasted into the first grade. Dr. Simmons said the findings of the third study support the effectiveness of an essential component of RTI models—individually tailored adjustment.

Enhancing Fraction Performance of At-Risk Fourth Graders: A Series of Randomized, Controlled Trials

Lynn Fuchs, Ph.D., Department of Special Education, Vanderbilt University

Dr. Fuchs explained that competence with fractions is foundational for learning more advanced math and that U.S. children are falling behind those in other countries in math performance. Dr. Fuchs and colleagues compared the conventional approach with an innovative method for teaching measurement interpretation of fractions to fourth graders in a Tier 2 setting.

Dr. Fuchs described several RCTs which suggested that improvement in measurement interpretation of fractions is a key mechanism explaining fraction learning, and instruction should move in that direction. In addition, she noted, students' initial working memory capacity moderated the effects of that year's program component contrast: five minutes of practice on conceptual activities versus fluency-building activities (both focused on the same measurement interpretation tasks). Students with very low working memory learned better with conceptual practice activities while students with adequate working memory learned better with fluency practice.

Dr. Fuchs concluded that the research shows positive effects of the intervention across several outcome measures and provides some insight for understanding both mediating and moderating factors. The research also contributes to identifying program components that maximize effects.

Team-Initiated Problem Solving

Rob Horner, Ph.D., College of Education, University of Oregon

Dr. Horner said that NCSER's role goes beyond influencing special education. MTSS represent a giant shift in the approach to teaching that ties together all the tiers of instruction. We are no longer seeking one intervention that works but rather multiple interventions at various levels of intensity, said Dr. Horner. Ideally, every school would have a series of programs.

MTSS require teachers and administrators to assess whether they are providing Tier 1 instruction level well enough to form the foundation for future learning. They also require them to make decisions in real-time about which students should be in which groups receiving which interventions—something not typically done at the school level.

Dr. Horner's group focuses on how teams in schools make decisions using the logic and data systems that other researchers are creating. The group seeks functional examples of iterative interventions. Dr. Horner and colleagues determined that teaching people about problem-solving is not sufficient, but coaching them through the process is.

The research focused on teams in four schools, all of which improved in measures of understanding meeting foundations (i.e., the components that support team problem-solving) and problem-solving after some coaching. Dr. Horner and colleagues are refining the training and coaching process for their intervention, Team-Initiated Problem-Solving (TIPS); they have found that those who receive the intervention are not only more likely to use the process with their teams but also are more likely to implement the plans that result from the team problem-solving effort and to document changes in student outcomes.

Dr. Horner offered some recommendations to IES on behalf of all the presenters:

- NCSER funding is focused on topics of high relevance. IES can tell Congress that 500 schools are behaving differently as a result of NCSER funding, and if that funding continues, the number will rise to 1,000.
- IES should continue to embrace the iterative development process, which is showing evidence of collaboration by design.
- IES should be proud of its grantees' use of a range of research methods. Single-case research methods can be critical to technology development in special education and to moving to larger scale research.
- Defining what should be done in schools is necessary but not sufficient; people need protocols that allow them to implement interventions.

Discussion

Dr. McLaughlin said the presentations demonstrate how IES is trying to address education at all levels and all tiers of instruction, as well as provide support at the system level to allow schools to implement interventions broadly.

Dr. Bryk said that Dr. Horner’s presentation in particular can be helpful in explaining to policymakers and the public what IES is doing. He would like to see even more intense focus on iterative research.

Dr. Loeb asked how researchers determined where a student falls on the continuum of learning when assigning the student to an intervention. Dr. Fuchs said her group looked at incoming competence in certain areas that are predictive of future outcomes. She said that fractions provide an unusual opportunity in the development of math skills, because they belong to a domain of understanding that is very different from whole-number skills. Notably, Dr. Fuchs pointed out that there are breakthrough moments in both math and reading where prior levels of competence can be overcome if the student is not constantly presented with tasks that rely on skills in which the student is not competent.

Dr. McLeod pointed out that Tier 2 and 3 are only as effective as the intervention and Tier 1 instruction combined. She asked about the results of RTI in schools with weak Tier 1 instruction in which everyone is in Tier 2 and a lot of students are Tier 3, which defeats the purpose of the intervention. Dr. Horner said that for schools, Tier 3 instruction creates the most pain, and systems want to reduce that pain.

Darryl J. Ford, Ph.D., asked how to maintain the effects of interventions, such as coaching around problem-solving. Dr. Horner said that sustainability requires that new practices be implemented only when the systems necessary to maintain those practices are also implemented, and those systems involve policies, funding, team organization, and data structures.

Dr. Bryk agreed on the need to consider systems—in particular, how to ensure the quality of interventions when they increase in scale. Lack of implementation fidelity and variable teacher effects are issues raised in other research. Dr. Bryk asked how those issues can be addressed. Dr. Fuchs replied that her team aims to keep interventions simple. Dr. Bryk concurred, saying that he hopes to incorporate reduced variability as a design concept.

Dr. Chard pointed out that 20 years ago, efforts in special education focused on disabling conditions, such as developmental and learning disabilities. He wondered what kind of impact the MTSS approach should have on the preparation of researchers in both general and special education. Dr. Simmons replied that her group first worked with general education teachers, but not a lot of students were identified as needing interventions. She said that, ultimately, the label of “disability” does not matter if MTSS can help teachers address their students’ problems.

Dr. Fuchs added that over the past 20 years, research has become more focused on those at risk rather than those with identified learning disabilities. She emphasized the need to look closely at those students who do not respond to interventions, because she believes many of them have both reading and behavioral problems. Dr. Chafouleas advocated for focusing on the problem instead of labeling the person. Dr. Chard said that position is revolutionary in that it requires attention to acceptable behavior in context—that is, defining a child not by a deficit but by the child’s relationship to the knowledge and skills desired.

Dr. Granger said the conversation tied in with the discussion about contextual and system-level factors that IES should pay attention to. The research presented seeks to pinpoint what does and does not work at

every level, from the system to the teacher to the student. He asked whether special education researchers had any data for their general education counterparts about characteristics (of schools, students, or classrooms) that would inform their work. Dr. Granger said it is important to study interventions in places that need help and to identify the constructs that define where an intervention can make a difference.

V. COMMUNICATION, DISSEMINATION, AND THE IMPACT OF IES'S RESEARCH

The Board's statutory responsibilities include:

...to recommend to the Director topics that require long-term, sustained, systematic, programmatic, and integrated research efforts, including knowledge utilization and wide dissemination of research... (Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, 20 U.S.C. § 116 (b) (9)).

The Board showed great interest throughout the year in the topic of communication of IES's research findings, discussing it at a number of meetings. The Board commends IES on its efforts during 2013-14 to improve communication between IES and educational practitioners and researchers, including:

- Continued efforts to improve the What Works Clearinghouse website to make it accessible to practitioners who use the website to gain insights into what works?
- Efforts on behalf of the Director and Commissioners to meet with stakeholder groups to solicit feedback on specific programs, grant schedules, and peer review comments.

At the January 13, 2014 meeting, the Board invited Dr. Jeffrey Valentine, Principals Investigator at the What Works Clearinghouse, (WWC) and Dr. Ruth Neild, Commissioner of the National Center on Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance to discuss current efforts:

Efforts to include post-secondary results as part of the What Works Clearinghouse

The overarching theme from the discussion on the WWC was the unique set of challenges to the postsecondary education research team. As Dr. Neild pointed out, postsecondary education is not necessarily standardized in design. However, the research in the WWC can play a critical role in consumer protection (from poor research) and also by impacting and informing policy. One of the contractors who support the clearinghouse advised that as the postsecondary education community becomes more involved with the research in the Clearinghouse, it would allow for greater visibility, relevance and accessibility of the research.

Areas for development within the WWC in postsecondary education research would include reporting more extensively on policy implementation and providing more context to assess the likelihood of generalizing the studies. Regarding the contractor teams, there is a need to revise standards and operating procedures across multiple contractors. It is important to build trust among researchers to use the clearinghouse despite these limitations.

Discussion

During the discussion of the WWC, Dr. Neild clarified that the contractors' role is in supporting grant-making review because of the turnaround time necessary for this large scale process.

Dr. Long inquired how researchers could be educated about the standards needed for inclusion in the Clearinghouse and how they might respond to the pace of change within the postsecondary research field. The contractor suggested that one particular way to engage more researchers would be to have the WWC team develop standards for implementation reporting and promote the standards through journals and conferences.

Dr. Gamoran asked whether this research could include realms outside of education such as the labor market. The contractor responded that the type of research and input the clearinghouse uses is informed by experts and can include those fields with relationships to education, such as the labor market. Dr. Chard pointed out that there could be more branded programs in postsecondary institutions, as opposed to the variety in approach seen now. Dr. Long also shared that IES may want to consider its position in those shared areas and take the lead in postsecondary education research.

VI. ADVOCACY FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH

As part of its mission, The Board envisions being a voice for education research – including the improvement of education research and its appropriate use in decision-making.

In September 2013, then NBES Chair, Dr. Bridget Terry Long, testified before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and the Workforce. Her testimony focused on the accomplishments of IES and what the NBES felt needed to be done to further enhance the impact of IES on research in Education. Her testimony is included in Appendix C.

Dr. Long's testimony focused on the three ways that IES has provided the necessary conditions for high-quality education research: first, it has taken on the role of creating a series of public goods, "that no one else would or could do without concern for bias; "second, it has led the way to redefining standards for "good evidence;" and third, IES has influenced education research by making large-scale studies possible to more researchers, placing a premium on relevance and usability.

In an increasingly complex society, data driven decisions and practices rooted in sound research continue to be critical. The board believes that it is imperative that IES continue to serve the role of being an unbiased source of rigorously vetted information.

The research community, in its efforts to further our understanding of what works in different contexts of education, will need to broaden its outlook to assist localities in understanding what works for them in particular. Not only should research be rigorous, but we argue that relevance and timeliness add value to the endeavor. With the ability to reach greater audiences and communities, we believe that the work being funded and vetted by IES will be of a great assistance in bringing that to bear.

Appendix A

National Board for Education Sciences
January 31, 2014 Meeting Agenda

Location:

Institute of Education Sciences Board Room
80 F Street NW, 1st Floor
Washington, DC 20001

Friday, January 31, 2014

- 8:00 a.m.–8:35 a.m. Call to Order, Approval of Agenda
- 8:35 a.m.–9:00 a.m. Election of New Board Leadership
Roundtable discussion by the Board
- 9:00 a.m.–9:15 a.m. Former and New Chairs' Remarks
- 9:15 a.m.–10:15 a.m. **Updates:** Recent Developments at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), including the Centers for Education Evaluation (NCEE), for Education Research (NCER), for Special Education Research (NCSER), and for Education Statistics (NCES)
John Q. Easton, IES Director
IES Commissioners Ruth Neild, Tom Brock, and Joan McLaughlin
- 10:15 a.m.–10:30 a.m. Morning Break
- 10:30 a.m.–11:30 p.m. Ongoing Efforts to Improve IES: Debriefing on the House Committee Hearing and GAO Report
Opening remarks by Bridget Terry Long
Opening remarks by John Q. Easton, IES Director
Opening remarks by Ruth Neild, Commissioner of NCEE
Roundtable discussion by NBES members
- 11:30 p.m.–12:00 p.m. Lunch Break
- 12:00 p.m.–1:00 p.m. Annual Ethics Training
Marcia Sprague, Ethics Division, Office of the General Counsel
- 1:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m. Supporting English Language Learners
Sean Reardon, Stanford University
Gabriela Uro, Manager ELL Policy and Research, Council of Great City Schools
Eileen de los Reyes, Deputy Superintendent of Academics, Boston Public Schools
Roundtable discussion by NBES members

2:30 p.m.–2:45
p.m. Afternoon Break

2:45 p.m.–4:15
p.m. What Works Clearinghouse — Postsecondary Topics
*Opening remarks by Ruth Neild, Commissioner of the National Center for
Education Evaluation (NCEE)*
*Remarks by Jeffrey Valentine, Principal Investigator, What Works
Clearinghouse — Postsecondary Topics*
Roundtable discussion by NBES members

4:15 p.m.–4:30
p.m. Closing Remarks
John Q. Easton, IES Director
NBES Chair

4:30 PM Adjourn

Appendix B

National Board for Education Sciences
June 16, 2014 Meeting Agenda

Location:

Institute of Education Sciences Board Room
80 F Street NW, 1st Floor
Washington, DC 20001

Monday, June 16, 2014

- 9:00 a.m.–9:05
a.m. Call to Order, Approval of Agenda
- 9:05 a.m.–10:15
a.m. Commissioners' Reports
Question and Answer period regarding reports
- 10:15 a.m.–10:30
a.m. Break
- 10:30 a.m.–12:00
p.m. Discussion on the future of IES Training Grants
Opening remarks by David Chard
Opening remarks by John Q. Easton, IES Director
Remarks by Tom Brock, Commissioner of NCER, and Joan McLaughlin, Commissioner of NCSEER
Roundtable discussion by NBES members
- 12:00 p.m.–1:00
p.m. Lunch
- 1:00 p.m.–3:00
p.m. Multi-tiered Systems of Support in the Context of College and Career Readiness Standards
Opening Remarks by David Chard and Joan McLaughlin, Commissioner of the National Center for Special Education Research
Remarks by IES-funded researchers with expertise in screening and progress monitoring, intervention, data-based decision making and professional development (awaiting confirmation)
Roundtable discussion by NBES members
- 3:00 p.m.–4:30
p.m. Closing Remarks
John Q. Easton, IES Director
David Chard, NBES Chair
- 3:30 p.m. Adjourn

Appendix C:

2013 Testimony of Dr. Bridget Terry Long To the Committee on Education and the Workforce U.S. House of Representatives

Prepared Statement of Dr. Bridget Terry Long, Ph.D., Xander Professor of Education and Economics Academic Dean, Harvard Graduate School of Education; Chair, National Board for Education Sciences

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Dr. Bridget Terry Long, and I am the Academic Dean and Xander Professor of Education and Economics at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Beyond my expertise as a researcher and faculty member, I am also the Chair of the National Board for Education Sciences, the advisory board of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). The National Board for Education Sciences is independent of IES, and we are tasked with advising the Director and reviewing and evaluating the work of IES. In this way, we provide a critical but also constructive perspective on the activities of IES.

My testimony reflects discussions and recommendations made by the Board as well as my observations as an experienced educational researcher who has interacted with IES on many levels. My comments today aim to provide an objective assessment of the role of IES, its contributions, and areas for improvement.

The Role of IES

In our current environment, educational research has become even more important as the penalties of poor achievement and lack of opportunity have never been greater. As we work to raise student achievement, foster productive learning environments, and bolster the social contributions of our schools and universities, the knowledge, inventions, and partnerships created through educational research are essential—it is through research that we determine the best ways to produce the needed gains and help to make tough decisions about how to use our limited funds. Before we can debate what policies we should implement, we first need a clear understanding of the facts and to have an accurate sense of the real costs and benefits of any policy or program. In essence, research is the foundation for improving education.

During the short history of IES, it has filled an essential role in providing and encouraging the necessary conditions for high-quality education research. While its impact is evident in many ways, I focus my comments on three main contributions. First, IES has taken the role of creating a series of public goods that no one else would or could do without concerns about possible bias. Second, it has led the way in efforts to reevaluate and redefine the standard of what is considered good evidence. Third, IES has influenced the kind of educational research that is done by making possible large-scale studies, pushing researchers to work closely with practitioners to ensure relevance and usability, and holding an unwavering focus on serving the national good.

(1) Creating Necessary Public Goods

As a federal entity, IES has taken leadership to provide several key public goods needed to support a strong educational system and research. By public goods, I mean things that benefit us all, but many of these goods would not otherwise be produced without government intervention. For example, IES provides the foundations of factual information and research with the collection of clear, consistent, high-quality data through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).¹ It is through the efforts of IES, which conducts its work free from political influence, that we are able to understand trends in our student populations, schools and universities, and an array of inputs and outcomes that span early childhood to adult education. These data also make possible a wealth of research conducted on every aspect of education.

Additionally, IES serves as a repository and distribution center of research, both studies funded by IES and those that are not. The dissemination and communication of objective information is a critical one for the nation. The education space is filled with many organizations, companies, and individuals who have varying objectives, agendas, and degrees of expertise. Therefore, it can be difficult to sort between the many studies, reports, and assertions to determine what is fact versus what is fiction. Moreover, the research community often lacks the training and incentives to translate complex research for a lay audience. In such a crowded space, IES stands as the best authority of rigorous research free from influence. It has helped to clarify what is known about issues related to large educational debates. Moreover, it has been helpful in discerning between conflicting and confusing reports on important issues. It has used its convening power to bring together researchers from various backgrounds to discuss the issues and coordinate research.² It has also conducted evaluations of federal initiatives.³

(2) Setting the Standards of "Good Evidence"

Before the creation of IES, many lamented that educational research was failing to answer important questions in convincing ways. The varying quality of research and lack of attention to certain issues led some to dismiss the educational research base as inadequate. IES has changed this dramatically by leading a critical assessment of past research and initiating a number of debates about what are appropriate methods and standards of rigor for the different approaches to educational One concrete example of this has been the push for randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which are considered the gold-standard of research and often used in the field of medicine. Prior to IES's leadership, RCTs were rarely conducted in education and not valued among many researchers. However, by pushing the field, providing support, and engaging researchers to develop ways of conducting such analyses while still being sensitive to needs of students and practitioners, educational research has progressed in fundamental ways with new important evidence on the effects of key programs and interventions. For example, in my own work with several colleagues, which was partially funded by IES, we demonstrated that providing low- and moderate-income families with streamlined personal assistance to complete the federal college financial aid application had large effects on college attendance and persistence. Because

we used a randomized controlled trial design, we were able to establish convincingly that our intervention was not only the cause of the educational gains; importantly, the program was also inexpensive.\4\

IES continues to engage the field in conversations about rigor in educational research. This is demonstrated by technical working groups that are establishing standards for specific research methodologies and helping to ensure that evaluations provide unbiased and causally-valid assessments.\5\ It is also worth noting that IES has developed a rigorous peer review process for evaluating grant proposals.

(3) Encouraging Relevant, Rigorous Research for the National Good

IES has used its resources and convening power to focus the field on research that is both rigorous and focused on shedding light on the major problems facing the country. By setting priorities and crafting calls for research proposals (i.e., Requests for Proposals or RFPs), IES has sent signals to the field about important topics that need answers, rigorous standards that must be upheld, and the importance of conducting research in partnership with practitioners.

Additionally, it has made possible research studies that would not have otherwise been conducted.

While there are private foundations and other organizations that support educational research, most focus on only a handful of topics and fund projects of limited size. But education is all encompassing, from the wide array of types of students, environments, needs, and goals, and there is much work to be done. With a national platform, IES has the unique ability to leverage researcher and practitioner expertise by signaling and providing incentives to conduct studies on issues of importance for the country. One way it has done this is by designing research competitions that focus on the major issues and areas of education. Along with this has come IES's emphasis on the importance of external validity in research, meaning that it has called for researchers to be accountable to external audiences on how the findings for one set of schools might be applicable to another set of schools.

IES has also been able to support large-scale projects that could not be easily funded by others. To learn more certain issues, studies must be large in scale and compare the experiences of districts across states or large populations of students. Without support from IES, this type of work would often not be possible, and the knowledge base that is being built as a result of this work has been valuable in improving student outcomes. Taken together, IES has both insured research on a breadth of topics while also making possible large-scale studies that have been incredibly beneficial to our understanding of how to help students.

Another way IES has influenced the research community is by highlighting the importance of partnerships between researchers and schools, districts, or state educational agencies. Because the delivery of education is the result of many actors, research can often be improved by being designed and conducted while working with practitioners. Additionally, by working closely with the field, researchers are much more likely to produce research that is relevant and useful in practice. However, such work can be difficult to manage and implement.

IES has pushed and supported such connections to the benefit of the research being conducted.\6\

Finally, it is important to note that IES has been instrumental in attracting talent to the study of education. With the signals it sends about important issues in education and the support it gives for research, IES has helped to attract a growing number of researchers with the tools and resources to support high-quality research and partner with the field. IES is helping to produce the next generation of scholars and innovators who will help to solve important problems in education.

The Strengths, Challenges, and Continuous Improvement of IES

The accomplishments of IES are numerous, and the researchers and innovators supported by IES funding will continue to have positive impacts on the lives of students as well as many other parts of our society. Nevertheless, in light of the Board and IES's commitment to continuous improvement, it is clear more can and needs to be done. In this spirit, the Board has worked to advise, review, and advance the activities of IES. The Board has matured to be an important place of feedback and expertise, and my comments here reflect continuing discussions between the Board and IES staff about how to address challenges facing the organization.

As I noted earlier, the dissemination and communication role of IES is an important one.

IES has filled a gap for the nation by providing clear, objective information and making it available to the public. While IES is a strong producer and supporter of information of value, it is still building capacity and expertise on how to disseminate that information, including methods that use the latest technology and outreach methods. This is a challenging feat. Unlike many other fields, education has large range of stakeholders and multiple audiences to address, including policymakers; practitioners from teachers to superintendents to state agencies; researchers; and students and their families. Each group needs different kinds of information in different forms.

The Board and IES staff believe strongly in the dissemination role of IES, and we have held a number of discussions on how to improve efforts. There are many examples of success and promise. For example, the Practice Guides distill a wealth of research into clear steps teachers can take to improve the learning of their students.⁷ The What Works Clearinghouse was created with the idea of helping the public understand research results and whether they were completed using rigorous methods. The dissemination of recent data reports and grant competitions include webinars and video media.⁸

However, more could be done in terms of reaching out to the many audiences of educational data and research, and there are many efforts underway at IES to address this challenge. They include:

Revisions to the website to make it easier to find important research and facts. For instance, a new contract was awarded this year to manage and enhance the What Works Clearinghouse.⁹ Additionally, as part of the RFP for the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), the contractor is expected to redesign the IES website to improve search capabilities and provide basic orientations to key topics and references for relatively inexperienced users.¹⁰

IES added new requirements to research grant competitions for researchers to develop dissemination plans for their studies. Moreover, NCSER released a report on how to make research more understandable, and it was presented to its grant recipients.¹¹

Establishing a grant competition to create a Research and Development Center on Knowledge Utilization. This Center will explore questions of how education researchers can make their work more

relevant and useful to practitioners located in state and local education agencies and in individual schools. This work is meant to address concerns that often there is only limited adoption of evidence-based practices.\12\

Related to the issue of dissemination is the relevance and usability of the research produced and funded by IES. This has been a major focus of IES, and there are many instances of the Institute meeting this goal. As noted above, the growing attention to the importance of partnerships has broadened the number of studies done in concert with schools and districts, and this approach increases the likelihood that the results will be relevant and useful for practitioners. Still, this has been an area of constant reevaluation, and there have been many activities recently to improve this function of IES. For example:

Revising and renegotiating the contracts for the Regional Education Labs (RELs). For example, earlier this year, IES released revised criteria for REL proposals and products. The criteria focus on issues related to the technical rigor of products (e.g., data quality, analysis methods), the relevance of the work (i.e., whether it provides evidence that can inform a practitioner's action or decision), and the readability of the products (i.e., whether the information is clear for its intended audiences). NCEE has also been working to build the capacity of the REL program by conducting webinars to help the RELs meet increasing standards in writing, collaboration, and measurement.\13\

Just recently, on August 12, 2013, IES convened a Product Feedback and Development Meeting with stakeholders from across the country to get suggestions about how to improve the usability and relevance of the products and services of the WWC and RELs.\14\

As an independent body tasked with providing constructive feedback to IES, the Board has been pleased with the fact that our feedback and that of others on these issues has been incorporated into the work of the Institute, and we believe these activities will help to strengthen IES's impact.

Another challenge facing IES is balancing the need to work in many areas with the reality of having limited resources. Because it is important to understand so many facets of education and the populations it impacts, it can be difficult to prioritize some areas over others or to decide not to fund research in some areas at all. Tough choices sometimes have to be made. For instance, this year, IES will not hold research competitions in special education.\15\ However, IES is not taking a haphazard approach to this dilemma. Recent discussions between the Board and IES staff have concerned if and how the Institute might decide to prioritize funding decisions. Moreover, IES is attempting to understand and improve the impact of the overall portfolio of research supported with IES funding. Together, we have been examining the research portfolios of NCER and NCSE to understand how IES might better target its research funding.

Revising ESRA: Recommendations from the NBES

At the June 20, 2012 NBES meeting, Board members discussed specific recommendations to revise ESRA. These recommendations build from previous suggestions made by the Board in May 2008 with several additional changes and revisions. Most notably, we suggest:

Establishing a requirement that the IES Director submit a biennial plan of activities to the Board for advice. Currently, the IES Director is only required to submit his or her priorities to the Board

every six years. Although the Board has many informal opportunities to provide feedback to the Director based on the strong working relationship between the current Board and current Director, the expectation of more frequent formal feedback should be documented.

Changing the term of a Board member to commence from the date of confirmation so that members have a full four years of service.

Automatically extending by one year the terms of Board members whose successors have not yet been appointed; this would help to ensure that the Board always has a sufficient number of members to be effective;

Giving the Board hiring and evaluation authority over the NBES Executive Director to ensure this role is independent of IES given the assessment duties of the Board;

Allowing for flexibility in the pay of the IES Director and Commissioners by making these positions eligible for "critical pay" under the Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004;

Removing privacy protection for individual schools in data reports, a protection that does not exist in any other federal statute or regulation. The current prohibition on revealing school identity means that useful information must be omitted from evaluation reports.

A full list of our recommendations and a marked-up copy of ESRA have been entered into the official record.

Conclusions

In summary, to have an informed populace and clarity on how best to educate our children and ourselves, there must be a robust foundation of high-quality data, rigorous, objective research and strong communication of evidence on what works and what does not. It is clear that IES has made substantial contributions to our understanding of how to improve education and is engaged in activities to address the challenges it faces. There is more work to be done, and as noted by our recommendations, the Board believes some changes to ESRA would improve the functioning of IES and the Board for the continued benefit of the country.