

Auburn University
College of Education

Boston University
Wheelock College of Education and Human
Development

Boston College
Lynch School of Education

Florida State University
College of Education

Georgia State University
College of Education & Human Development

Indiana University
School of Education

Iowa State University
College of Human Sciences

John Hopkins University
School of Education

Lehigh University
College of Education

North Carolina State University
College of Education

Oklahoma University
Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education

Penn State University
College of Education

Purdue University
College of Education

Syracuse University
School of Education

Texas A&M University
College of Education and Human Development

The Ohio State University
College of Education and Human Ecology

University of Arizona
School of Education

University of California – Santa Barbara
Gevirtz Graduate School of Education

University of Central Florida
College of Community Innovation and Education

University of Connecticut
Neag School of Education

University of Florida
College of Education

University of Georgia
School of Education

University of Houston
College of Education

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
College of Education

University of Kansas
School of Education

University of Maryland College Park
College of Education

University of Minnesota
College of Education and Human Development

University of Missouri
College of Education

University of Nevada-Reno
College of Education

University of North Carolina
School of Education

University of Oklahoma
College of Education

University of Oregon
College of Education

University of Pittsburgh
School of Education

University of Southern California
Rossier School of Education

University of Texas at Austin
College of Education

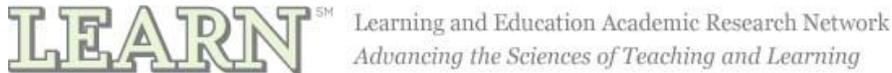
University of Vermont
College of Education and Social Services

University of Wisconsin – Madison
School of Education

University of Wyoming
College of Education

Vanderbilt University
Peabody College of Education and Human
Development

Virginia Commonwealth University
School of Education



May 10, 2022

Mark Schneider
Director of the Institute
of Education Sciences (IES)
550 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Director Schneider, we are writing on behalf of the Learning and Education Academic Research Network (LEARN) Coalition to comment on “*The Future of Education Research at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)*” released by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM). LEARN thanks IES for charging NASEM to release this report and recognizing the value of a non-biased review of the research functions of the agency. Furthermore, we appreciate the NASEM panelists and authors for their time, as well as their thorough review of the public comments we submitted to them. LEARN members have reviewed and discussed “*The Future of Education Research at IES*” and would like to highlight and comment on certain recommendations of the report.

On the Need for Increased Federal Funding for IES

LEARN has been a staunch Federal advocate for increased IES funding. Our members know first hand through their work with IES, how the agency has struggled to adequately accomplish its goals due to chronic underfunding. For example, IES has shared that over the past few years, the NCER and NCSER core research grant RFA’s have only had a 12-15 percent success rate. Additionally, NCSER was unable to fund all grant applications worthy of funding in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 due to a lack of funds. This is further exacerbated by the fact that IES funding does “not appear to be on par with that of other scientific funding agencies,” as highlighted in Recommendation 9.2 of the report. While IES has seen increases in its research functions in FY2021 and FY2022, more Federal support is needed to make up for years of flat funding so IES can best address the numerous educational challenges currently facing the nation. If IES does not receive the necessary investments to fund its work, then researchers cannot create solutions that improve outcomes for students.

Now more than ever, districts and schools need the insights from quality research to tackle growing academic disparities and support students who face mental health challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. LEARN agrees with the committee’s recommendation that Congress should reexamine the IES budget, which does not have the adequate resources to fully implement the report’s suite of recommendations. We look forward to continuing our advocacy for IES and the critical services it provides to educators and students nationwide.

On the Topics and Types of Research within NCER/NCSER

To ensure that IES can effectively respond to needs from the field, the committee recommended that IES rejuvenate its project type structure and ground the structure in the specific challenges facing districts, schools and students today. LEARN supports

recommendation 4.1 which proposes that IES adopt new categories for types of research that will be more responsive to the needs, structure, resources and constraints found in education. Additionally, we support the specific types focused on in the report, including Discovery and Needs Assessment, Development and Adaptation, Impact and Heterogeneity and Knowledge Mobilization and Measurement.

The current requirements from the National Center for Education Research (NCER) and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE) maintain that funded studies include measures of student outcomes, even though a topic, such as teacher education, may be limited in collecting data and information on student outcomes. When projects do not lend themselves well to randomized control trials or when the focus is on stakeholders in education other than students, pathways to funding at IES can be restrictive. LEARN agrees with recommendation 5.1 that IES should consider: “Allowing use of outcomes beyond the student level (classroom, school, institution, district) as the primary outcome.” LEARN believes that additional forms of study, such as outcomes beyond the school day or expanding the choice of research design, can be beneficial to respond to the needs of schools and districts. However, LEARN believes that IES should not implement any new forms of study that eliminate those currently used by researchers. Rather, LEARN believes IES should encourage additional forms of study to existing measures.

In addition to forms of study, LEARN members appreciate the committee’s discussion of topics IES should prioritize. Our members wanted to highlight that English Language Learners (EL), which were not mentioned in the report, are an important subpopulation of students which require additional research and focus from IES. Rather than explicitly endorse the specific topics proposed, LEARN members feel that IES should work to regularly update their topic areas with input from the field, academic and scholarly community as well as the National Board of Education Sciences (NBES). We believe that repopulating NBES, which per the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) is assigned to approve IES priorities in partnership with the Director, is a critical step to ensuring that topic areas are up-to-date and relevant to the field.

On Methods of Research and Diverse Representation in Education Research

The report indicates that training program requests for applications (RFAs) have historically had three main objectives: (1) to increase the number of scientists who can conduct rigorous, independent education research; (2) to increase the number of education researchers who are able to complete projects funded by IES; and (3) to advance the field of education research. LEARN agrees with the committee that, in the past 5 to 10 years, a fourth objective has come to light: the need to diversify the researchers and institutions that participate in training opportunities provided by NCER and NCSE, which will, in the short- and long-term, increase the diversity of the education research workforce.

LEARN agrees with the committee that IES should expand their methods training programs to broaden participation. Researchers need to understand “how and why educational practices, interventions, and policies work.” This recommendation includes a broad range of approaches—qualitative methods, survey research and mixed methods—to fully prepare researchers to address the most pressing questions facing the education research community. LEARN agrees with the committee that IES should build off its programs that are already effectively broadening participation, namely the Pathways to Education Sciences programs and the Early Career Mentoring Program for Faculty at Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). Additionally, IES should implement a variety of strategies to broaden participation in training programs, including providing targeted outreach to underrepresented institutions, supporting early career mentoring, requiring that training program applications clearly

include a plan for equitable participation and inclusive programming, offering supplements to existing research grants to support participation from those from underrepresented groups and expanding training opportunities for pre-doctoral students from MSIs and other underrepresented groups and institutions. More specifically, our members want to highlight the need to focus training program resources on pre-doctoral and doctoral students, and monitor the efficacy of such programs in preparing students for successful research careers. LEARN also strongly encourages IES to partner with peer institutions and outside organizations to review the rigor and standards of excellence in qualitative and interpretative methodologies. Of note, efforts to diversify the training grant recipients should be done through additional funding.

Additionally, LEARN supports the committee's recommendation to gather more data on which training programs are effective and the most impactful. LEARN agrees that to fully understand the efficacy of different programs, we need to know who participates in the programs, how their participation has affected their ability to succeed in their careers and how their participation has shaped the field of education research. In the past few years, IES has implemented changes, such as strategies to retain pre- and postdoctoral fellows from underrepresented groups, using an interdisciplinary approach in training programs and including various required activities for trainees, but further information on the success of these efforts is not readily available. LEARN strongly encourages additional Federal support to expand these types of programs and gather more information on their success.

On Involving SEAs/LEAs in Peer Review Panels

As we have mentioned in previous letters, LEARN believes that SEAs and LEAs are at the core of our members' everyday work, and we believe that IES should implement changes that strengthen the work between researchers and practitioners. While we agree partnerships between practitioners and researchers should be strong, we urge IES to keep review panels focused on researchers, as this is more in line with IES's responsibility to provide a scientific peer review and rather identify other ways for SEAs/LEAs to be involved. For example, we propose that practitioners have a strong role in helping researchers develop effective dissemination plans, so that researchers can better address how to share information with communities and schools and can evaluate insights while considering local conditions. LEARN also agrees with the committee that a working group consisting of practitioners, policymakers and members of the research community could help develop realistic mechanisms to incorporate practitioner and policymaker perspectives in the research process. Additionally, LEARN agrees with the committee that IES should offer more opportunities for researcher-practitioner collaboration and that NCER should continue to fund research that involves partnerships between researchers and practitioners.

On IES' Application and Review Timeline

Lastly, LEARN agrees with the committee that IES should strive to review and fund grants on a shorter timeline and move to offering two grant applications cycles per year. Two grant cycles per year would expand the number of projects that get funded, encourage a more diverse pool of applications and allow additional opportunities for researchers from underrepresented backgrounds to apply, be approved and have their project funded by IES. We believe that this proposal must be accompanied by increased funding in order to ensure that increasing the number of grant cycles expands opportunities without overburdening IES and its staff and simply spreading existing resources more thinly.

Thank you again for your call for comment, we look forward to engaging further on ways for IES to continue to expand and improve. Should you wish to follow up on this information, please contact Alex Nock at anock@pennhillgroup.com

Best Regards,

Camilla P. Benbow, Ed.D.

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