

February 14, 2007

**Board of Advisors**

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Board of Advisors of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update on our work

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I've prepared a brief update on recent Coalition activities, for your review. Please let me know if you have questions or would like additional information. Any advice you may have would be much appreciated.

**1. The President's FY 08 budget released last week includes \$10 million for a new competitive grant program at HHS to fund evidence-based nurse home visitation programs - an initiative we helped support through our work with OMB.**

Attached is the relevant excerpt from the budget. This initiative was developed by OMB and HHS officials; we provided key support through our OMB Help Desk by validating nurse home visitation (specifically, the [Nurse-Family Partnership](#) program) as unique in the strength of the evidence of a large, sustained effect on participants' lives. This new HHS program, if funded by Congress, will provide seed money to leverage larger funding contributions for nurse visitation from other federal sources (e.g., Medicaid, Early Head Start, TANF, Maternal and Child Health Grants) as well as non-federal sources. This may prove to be an important model that could be replicated in other policy areas to focus federal funds on research-proven interventions.

**2. Our Coalition has proposed a new Bipartisan Legislative Initiative for U.S. Social Policy, to systematically incorporate evidence-based provisions into federal social programs so as to greatly increase program effectiveness. (Click [here](#) for our 2-page concept paper).**

In a legislative landscape seeking concrete new ideas that are budget-neutral yet could have a major impact on people's lives, we believe this proposal could attract strong bipartisan support. In January, the Brookings Institution's Center on Children and Families and the Coalition sponsored a meeting of senior federal officials on this proposal, hosted by Isabel Sawhill, Ron Haskins, and myself, and we've held several promising follow-up meetings with key Congressional staff (Democrats and Republicans). Any suggestions you may have on this effort -- especially, current or former Members of Congress who might help champion it -- would be very much appreciated.

**3. Senator Feingold (D-WI) has introduced public housing legislation that includes an important provision for rigorous - preferably randomized - evaluations, which we assisted his staff in developing.**

Specifically, the legislation (S. 427) includes a 2% funding set-aside for evaluations of activities to prevent and reduce violent and drug-related crime in public housing - evaluations that "use rigorous methodologies, particularly random assignment (where practicable), that are capable of producing scientifically-valid knowledge." Laurie Robinson on our Board connected us with the Senator's Judiciary Committee staff, making this development possible.

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**4. On February 21-22, we will pilot a new workshop - [How To Use Rigorous Evidence About "What Works" To Improve Government Programs: Practical, Cost-Effective Strategies](#) - for senior federal agency staff and other key stakeholders.**

The workshop has attracted the participation of senior staff from a number of agencies - including the Departments of Education, Labor, and HHS, as well as the National Institutes of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, General Accounting Office, and Indian Health Service. We are encouraged by the strong demand for the workshop (with minimal advertising, we reached our maximum capacity of 40 participants), and may hold additional workshops later this year.

**5. We've recently issued several new publications, as follows:**

- A new addition to our Social Programs That Work website: "[Check and Connect](#)" - a dropout prevention program for high school students with learning, emotional, and/or behavioral disabilities. Well-designed randomized controlled trials show a sizable decrease in students' dropout rates, and increase in attendance and academic credits earned. (Click on the title above to see our summary of the evidence). Also, we will shortly add two new welfare-to-work programs to this website.
- [When Is It Possible To Conduct a Randomized Controlled Trial in Education at Reduced Cost, Using Existing Data Sources? A Brief Overview](#). This document focuses on educational evaluations but its key principles are applicable to many other policy areas.
- [Developing an Effective Evaluation Strategy: Suggestions for Federal and State Education Officials](#). We developed an earlier version of this document for OMB at their request; OMB then circulated it to the agencies as part of the Congressionally-established Academic Competitiveness Council. The document focuses on educational evaluations but its key principles are applicable to many other policy areas.

I hope this update is helpful, and I will continue to keep you posted on developments. As you know, support for our work has been provided by William T. Grant Foundation, the Jerry Lee Foundation, and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.