

September 10, 2007

Board of Advisors **MEMORANDUM**

Robert Boruch  
University of Pennsylvania

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

Jonathan Crane  
Coalition for Evidence-Based  
Policy

FROM: Jon Baron

David Ellwood  
Harvard University

RE: Update on our work

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Judith Gueron  
MDRC

Below is a brief update on recent Coalition activities to advance evidence-based reforms in government programs. Please let me know if you have questions or would like additional information. Any advice you have would be much appreciated.

Ron Haskins  
Brookings Institution

**1. The Senate's FY08 funding bill for Labor-HHS-Education includes important new evidence-based reforms that we helped to develop and/or advance. The bill, scheduled shortly for full Senate consideration, includes the following items that we directly assisted with or that were developed by Appropriations Committee staff with whom we've partnered over the past few years.**

Blair Hull  
Matlock Capital

Robert Hoyt  
Jennison Associates

David Kessler  
Former FDA Commissioner

Jerry Lee  
Jerry Lee Foundation

Dan Levy  
Harvard University

Diane Ravitch  
New York University

Howard Rolston  
Abt Associates

Isabel Sawhill  
Brookings Institution

Martin Seligman  
University of Pennsylvania

Robert Solow  
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Nicholas Zill  
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- Full funding (\$10.3 million) for the evidence-based nurse visitation program in the President's FY 08 budget, which is designed to provide seed money to scale up research-proven models such as the [Nurse Family Partnership](#). As you'll recall, we helped support the development of this program by OMB. In addition, Board member Jerry Lee and I met with Senator Mary Landrieu this summer and enlisted her help in ensuring funding in the Senate bill. As noted in our last update, the House appropriations bill also includes full funding for this program.
- A sizable increase (\$20 million) in funding for rigorous - particularly randomized - research at the Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences (IES). This is \$20 million more than last year's amount and the amount requested in the President's budget. The Committee report states that "these funds should be used for activities such as, funding large-scale randomized evaluations of programs that appear to be particularly promising through small-scale evaluations; funding non-profit developers of proven programs to help them create capacity for training, materials production, and other activities that would enable these programs to be utilized more widely; and fund researchers to carry out large-scale, randomized evaluations of existing programs." The Senate bill's funding increase will now be reconciled with the House bill, which includes a reduction of \$5 million in IES research.
- Strong support in the bill's report language for IES as the lead agency for evaluations of federal education programs, to ensure the evaluations' scientific rigor and independence. The Committee language is based on a National Board for Education Sciences recommendation that we helped to draft. The Senate language also appears in nearly identical form in the House report. It reads as follows:

"The Committee strongly supports the Department's efforts to carry out congressionally authorized evaluations of Federal education programs using rigorous methodologies, particularly random assignment, that are capable of producing scientifically valid knowledge regarding which program activities are effective. To ensure that authorized evaluations are conducted in a rigorous manner that is independent of the program office

and includes scientific peer review, the Committee believes that the Institute of Education Sciences should be the lead agency for the design and implementation of these evaluations. The Committee believes further that it is essential for program offices to work collaboratively with the Institute to include a priority or requirement in program solicitations for grantee participation in such evaluations, including random assignment, to the extent the Institute deems appropriate and where not specifically prohibited by law."

- A \$33.5 million increase over last year in IES's Statewide Data Systems program to facilitate rigorous research in K-12 education. As you'll recall, we helped obtain initial funding for this program in FY 05 through our work with the Committee. This program awards grants to states to collect longitudinal data on individual student achievement - data which greatly facilitates carrying out randomized controlled trials and other rigorous longitudinal studies. The House bill includes a \$13 million funding increase for this program.
- Report language urging the Labor Department, in its program to facilitate the re-entry of prisoners into the community, to focus funding on research-proven activities. The language specifically urges the Department to fund organizations that implement activities "shown in well-designed randomized controlled trials to have sizeable, sustained effects on important workforce and reintegration outcomes . . . ." We provided assistance to Committee staff in drafting this language.
- Similar report language directed toward the Department of HHS generally. This language urges the Secretary of HHS "to work across the Department to direct its resources toward programs with the highest evidentiary standards, such as randomized trials . . . ." (Click [here](#) to download a short pdf file showing all relevant excerpts in the Appropriations Committee report.)

## **2. A National Academy of Sciences panel has called for randomized evaluations in one of the largest federal technology programs.**

The panel recently issued an important report assessing the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, which is administered by 11 federal agencies and awards approximately \$2 billion each year to small high-tech companies to develop new technologies. One the report's key recommendations, which we helped to draft, is that "Agencies should . . . ensure that program modifications are designed, monitored, and evaluated, so that positive and negative results can be effectively evaluated. Where feasible and appropriate, the agencies should conduct scientifically-rigorous experiments to evaluate their most promising SBIR approaches - experiments in which SBIR program applicants, awardees, and/or research topics are randomly assigned to the new approach or to a control group that participates in the agency's usual SBIR process."

## **3. We've recently issued two new publications, as follows:**

- A new addition to our Social Programs That Work website: [Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program](#) (a comprehensive, year-round youth development program for economically disadvantaged teens). Multi-site randomized controlled trial shows sizable reductions in teen pregnancy and births, and increases in high school graduation and college enrollment.
- A new addition to our Evidence-Based Policy Help Desk for OMB/agencies: [Checklist for Reviewing a Randomized Controlled Trial of a Social Program or Project](#), To Assess Whether It Produced Valid Evidence on the program or project's effectiveness. This is a short checklist, written in plain language, that is based on well-established principles for reviewing such studies.

4. **We are seeking to hire a Project Leader -- a position offering an excellent opportunity for a young professional to work with government officials on evidence-based policy reforms.** Any recommendations of potential candidates would be very much appreciated. Also, please feel free to forward this announcement to anyone who may be interested.

I hope this update is helpful. 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.