

December 19, 2008

Board of Advisors

MEMORANDUM

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

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update on our work

Below is a brief update on recent developments in our efforts 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. .

1. On December 3rd, we released the first results of our initiative - now being reviewed by Congress - to identify social programs meeting "Top Tier" evidence of effectiveness.

As you'll recall, recent Congressional legislative provisions seek to focus funds in certain federal social programs on models and strategies ("interventions") meeting Top Tier evidence of effectiveness - i.e., "that have been shown, in well-designed randomized controlled trials, to produce sizeable, sustained effects on important outcomes." To assist federal agencies, grantees, and others in implementing these provisions effectively, we launched an initiative last spring, including formation of an expert [Advisory Panel](#), to identify interventions meeting this evidence standard - an initiative that Congress is interested in and has asked GAO to assess. On December 3rd we released the Panel's decisions in the first phase of the initiative, addressing interventions for children age 0-6. The results are summarized [here](#), including the Panel's identification of two interventions in this policy area meeting the Top Tier evidence standard: the [Nurse-Family Partnership](#) (a nurse home visitation program) and [Success for All](#) in grades K-2 (a school-wide reform program).

2. The Department of Labor has engaged the Coalition to conduct scientific peer review of DOL-funded evaluations of employment and training programs.

Specifically, we are conducting reviews of the draft evaluations, that focus on answering a key question: Did the study produce (or is it producing) scientifically-valid estimates of the program's impact? The reviews also offer suggestions for improvement in the study and/or future research efforts. Our comments - including those of leading external researchers that we've involved - accompany the draft study reports when they are submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for final policy-level review. This project began in September; we believe it may be a highly effective and efficient way to assist DOL in ensuring that their funded evaluations produce valid evidence about program effectiveness.

3. We have provided input to the Obama-Biden transition team, and incoming Administration officials, in two key policy areas:

- Education: Urging appointment of a Director of the Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) who can address a key barrier to U.S. educational progress - the lack of valid evidence about "what works." (See two-page overview [here](#).)
- Health Care: Urging a federal strategy to reduce the rapid growth in U.S. health care costs

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through rigorous evidence about what works to contain cost. (See two-page overview [here](#).)

- 4. In October, we hosted a major policy forum - "Rigorous Evidence: Key To Progress Against World Poverty?" - in collaboration with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC was established by Congress in 2004 as an important new vehicle for international development assistance).**

The forum attracted a capacity crowd of over 100 participants, including leaders of the development policy and research community, to discuss MCC's innovative approach to sponsoring rigorous independent evaluations of its funded projects. Based on the feedback forms and follow-up discussions, the forum was extremely well-received. Click to view the forum [overview](#) and [transcript](#).

I hope this update is helpful.