

Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives
Hearing
Education Research:
Exploring Opportunities to Strengthen the Institute of Education Sciences
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Oral Testimony of
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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.

I am also the Chair of the National Board for Education Sciences, the advisory board of the Institute of Education Sciences or IES.

The Board is independent of IES, and we are tasked with advising the Director and reviewing and evaluating its work. 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.

The Role of IES

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.

During the short history of IES, it has filled an essential role in providing and encouraging the necessary conditions for high-quality education research. **I focus my comments on three main contributions.**

First, IES has taken the role of creating a series of important public goods.

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.

Additionally, IES serves as a repository and distribution center of objective research. This is vitally important because 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.

IES stands as the best authority of rigorous research free from influence.

Second, IES has led the way in efforts to reevaluate and redefine the standard of what is considered good evidence.

Before the creation of IES, many lamented that education research was failing to answer important questions in convincing ways.

One example of what IES has done is to push for randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which are considered the gold-standard of research and often used in the field of medicine.

By providing support and engaging researchers to develop ways of conducting RCTs while still being sensitive to needs of students, educational research has progressed in fundamental ways with new important evidence on the effects of key programs and interventions.

Moreover, IES continues to engage the field in conversations about rigor as demonstrated by technical working groups tasked with ensuring that evaluations provide unbiased assessments.

Third, IES has influenced the kind of education research that is done.

While many organizations support or conduct education 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.

This includes large-scale projects that would not otherwise be conducted but which shed considerable light on important issues.

Another contribution of IES has been to highlight the importance of partnerships between researchers and schools, districts, or state educational agencies. By working closely with the field, researchers are much more likely to produce research that is relevant and useful in practice.

Finally, it is important to note that IES has been instrumental in attracting talent to the study of education with training, tools, and resources to support high-quality research.

The Strengths, Challenges, and Continuous Improvement of IES

While the accomplishments of IES are numerous, the Board and IES are committed to continuous improvement. In this spirit, the Board has worked to advise, review, and advance the activities of IES.

As I noted earlier, IES has filled a gap for the nation by providing clear, objective information. However, more could be done to communicate and disseminate this research.

This is a challenging feat. Education has an incredibly 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.

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.

Additionally, there are many efforts underway to improve the work of IES. They include:

- Revisions to the website
- New requirements for funded researchers to develop dissemination plans for their studies.
- Establishing a grant competition to create a *Research and Development Center on Knowledge Utilization*.

To ensure relevance and usability, IES has also:

- Revised and renegotiated the contracts for the Regional Education Labs (or RELs) focusing on rigor, usability, and partnerships with the field
- And, just last month, 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 What Works Clearinghouse and RELs.

These activities will help to strengthen IES's impact.

Revising ESRA: Recommendations from the NBES

I have also entered into the record a full list of the Board's recommendations regarding ESRA.

Conclusions

In summary, 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.