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

LEARN℠ Learning and Education Academic Research Network
Advancing the Sciences of Teaching and Learning

August 11, 2021

Adam Gamoran

Committee on The Future of Education Research at the Institute of Education Sciences
National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine
500 Fifth St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Dr.Gamoran:

We are writing on behalf of the Learning and Education Academic Research Network (LEARN) Coalition to provide recommendations to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NAS) panel on "The Future of Education Research at the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)." LEARN, a coalition of 40 leading research colleges across the country, advocates for the importance of research on learning and development. As experts in the field, LEARN members provide evidence-based information to guide legislators and policy makers while advocating for an increased Federal investment in education research. With this letter, we hope to provide valuable insight on how this panel's recommendations should aim to improve IES and its critical work.

As the education world works towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, IES can play an important role in supporting education research on learning recovery. Consequently, the timing of this panel's recommendations should account for and address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education world. While this response to the pandemic is critical, we also strongly urge the panel to consider a long term and broad view of its charge, so as not to lose momentum and focus on the many other domains of research that are so crucial for the nation's schools, students and communities. In short, IES's role in spurring high quality education research and discovery of knowledge across the full spectrum of education is more critical now than ever.

After listening to both NAS public meetings, LEARN would like to respond to the four guiding questions asked in the afternoon of June 29 on "Knowledge Gaps in Education Research" and "Supporting Beneficial Research Partnerships." As Deans of Schools of Education from around the nation, LEARN provides a valuable perspective on the challenges and successes facing the education research world.

From your position in the field, what are the current knowledge gaps that could benefit from more robust research attention?

While we know a great deal around certain areas of research (for example how children learn to read), other areas we have little to no knowledge. Additionally, as research is conducted, we are exposed to new factors that influence the education of children and adults, raising new areas in which we need to develop knowledge. Below are several areas we believe there are gaps in research that need additional attention.

Overall, education research should investigate the student holistically; students need to learn about persistence, endurance and perseverance in addition to developing their content knowledge, cognitive skills, and problem-solving ability. This calls for a better understanding of effective interventions on student social and emotional learning (SEL), including school-based counseling interventions for significant mental health stressors. Schools need to develop confident and flexible learners and

problem-solvers, ones who can embrace ambiguity and nuance, who can move away from binary thinking and who can manage the complexity in challenging problems.

LEARN members also believe research is required on virtual learning at all ages. In addition to studying the effectiveness of current virtual programs, researchers should capitalize on the range of data and digital learning applications in their research and develop new ways for children to be learning with the use and assistance of technology. Virtual learning is still in its infancy. We must continue to tap into its potential to better help children learn. However, as we know, learning does not take place in isolation, and we note that it is also essential to conduct research that studies the systems of public education that support and/or inhibit improvement, and promising approaches and practices.

We need more research on successful interventions that can address the achievement gap. This is especially relevant after this past year when this gap grew and became much larger. How do we catch students up if they have fallen behind while still challenging students who are making good educational progress?

Lastly, we submit that there needs to be much more research around successful implementation and scale up of the contexts, structures, and approaches that support research take-up, including the conditions and types of research that are best aligned to research-practice partnerships.

Where are the human capital gaps that could benefit from better or more readily available training, and what kind of training is necessary?

LEARN believes it is critical to support the education research pipeline by training and providing grant opportunities to new researchers, including graduate students seeking to embark on a career in education research, as well as fellowships and training grants. The last two years have been highly detrimental to rising researchers, as projects and funding streams were paused in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the staggering learning loss being experienced by students due to the pandemic, it is important that IES provides researchers from a wide range of backgrounds with the grant opportunities to identify and develop innovative, evidence-backed and effective educational interventions. Using what we already know will only get us so far and not investing in our early career researchers will reduce our future potential at solving the problems facing education.

While a focus on research on the most effective interventions is important, we also need the nation's future generation of researchers to study educational systems, and policies that address complex educational challenges, including preparing teachers and leaders. Specifically, we note the need for more pre-doctoral training grants and a focus on mixed -methodologies as well as methodologies and approaches for research-practice partnerships, including improvement science. This strand of research can also include the development of researchers to focus on developing culturally relevant methodologies and approaches.

How does the field support and sustain mutually beneficial partnerships in education research?

The field, as well as IES as a federal grantmaking organization, must foster a greater number and more powerful set of partnerships. IES's research-practitioner partnerships are one example of IES seeking to foster partnerships in the education research space. However, the benefit of these partnerships is largely limited to only the organizations actively involved in the specific grant or research work envisioned by the partnership. To further drive the expansion of the partnership model, LEARN proposes that IES create a matching directory of locales, school districts, entities and organizations that are seeking research partnerships so that connections can be more efficiently and equitably made. This directory would not promise or require IES grant funding, but rather serve as a clearinghouse for those seeking to connect. Since the partnerships are reciprocal relationships, expanding access to this opportunity equally will benefit both the education and research field.

What are the conditions necessary for ongoing partnerships?

To identify the ingredients of a successful partnership, we need to identify the types of research that are best suited for partnerships. Additionally, there are multiple types and approaches to partnerships with

little research on the variation and the impacts. A broader research agenda into partnerships is warranted. Questions that must be asked as part of this agenda include:

- How can research funding balance response to local needs and priorities, and support research that is generalizable and builds a knowledge base all while providing clear standards of evidence and scientific merit?

- How is partnership and improvement science blended with, and used in concert with other types of research and knowledge funded by IES, rather than separate from research funded through other priorities?

Additional Comments on IES independence, RFP timing and IES Funding Levels

Outside of our immediate comments on the questions posed during the June 29th panel, we would also like to emphasize several other points. First, we view IES' independence from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) as critical as it allows for flexibility in quickly identifying and addressing research problems and issues. LEARN finds that this independent structure is most effective when IES is led by both a director and board. This structure is key to the integrity of IES and it is critical that IES populate the National Board for Education Sciences (NBES) which has been largely nonfunctional for the past several years due to few or no active members. We also want to emphasize the paramount importance of scientific merit and peer review in the funding process.

Second, we are concerned about the amount of time that IES generally permits between the release of a grant competition and the due date for proposals with respect to Request for Proposals (RFPs) that utilize partnerships. The time allotted generally does not sufficiently allow for developing the conditions for deep and ongoing partnerships. We recommend that IES consider establishing separate timeframes for issuance to proposal date when considering approaches for RFPs for new partnerships versus RFPs for established partnerships.

Finally, LEARN would be remiss to overlook the budget limitations IES currently faces. Conversations with IES staff have uncovered that they are working at capacity and straining to adequately operate competitions and identify priorities. As we have discussed above, there is a vast amount of research we need to conduct and knowledge we need to develop in order to address the education challenges of today's students. IES must be properly supported and staffed to allow for this work to occur intentionally and effectively.

This is especially critical in research on special education, which is presently spearheaded by IES's National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER). NCSER received over $71 million in FY 2010 but was misguidedly cut to less than $51 million in the subsequent fiscal year. NCSER's funding reached at high of $58.5 million in FY 2021, but that is $27.1 million short of the buying power of the FY 2010 NCSER funding level after factoring in inflation.

Likewise, Research, Development and Dissemination (R, D and D) funding, IES's largest research account, was $200.2 million in FY 2010. The FY 2021 R, D and D funding level is $195.9 million, which is $45 million short of what the FY 2010 amount would buy in today's dollars. Without an increase in funds for R, D and D and NCSER, IES will not be able to properly address this panel's recommendations nor drive the education research currently required. We hope the NAS panel will underscore the need for Congress to increase IES' funding in their recommendations.

Thank you for your commitment to sustaining and strengthening the nation's education research infrastructure. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Alex Nock at 202 495-9497 or anock@pennhillgroup.com.

Respectfully Submitted,

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