

**Testimony of the Learning and Education Academic Research Network (LEARN)  
before the Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health, & Human Services, Education, and  
Related Agencies regarding the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of  
Education and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the  
National Institute of Mental Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.**

**May 16, 2023**

On behalf of the LEARN Coalition, we urge support for increased funding for several key education research programs that the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (LHHS) subcommittee will debate as part of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 appropriations process.

LEARN, a coalition of 41 leading research colleges of education across the country, supports critical investments in research aimed at advancing the scientific understanding of learning and development. We advocate for greater funding for these priorities across all Federal agencies, including the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

Specifically, LEARN is requesting no less than \$900 million for IES overall with \$291.9 million dedicated to the Research, Development and Dissemination (RD&D) line item and \$71.6 million for the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER). Within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), LEARN requests that \$1.87 billion go towards NICHD and \$2.54 billion go towards NIMH. While advocating for these increased resources for FY2024, we are deeply appreciative of the funding that IES and its programs and NICHD and NIMH received as a part of the FY2023 appropriations process.

**Overall Spending Allocation for the LHHS Subcommittee**

In addition to urging the subcommittee to make key education research investments in FY 2024, LEARN wants to stress the importance of the LHHS Subcommittee receiving a sufficient allocation (or “302(b)”) that allows the subcommittee to robustly fund the programs and agencies within its jurisdiction. Should Congress seek to return to annual discretionary spending caps it is critical that such caps separately account for defense and non-defense discretionary spending. Whether through such caps or the more traditional subcommittee allocations, we urge that the LHHS subcommittee have the budget authority necessary to be able to make investments across its jurisdiction that improve the education, health and working conditions in our nation.

**Institute of Education Sciences**

As the primary Federal agency charged with supporting research for education practice and policy, IES is essential to developing a comprehensive, reliable, evidence base and ensuring that teaching and learning practices are grounded in this evidence base. While 12-15 percent of NCER and NCSER’s grant awards have been funded over the last several years, the number of grant competitions offered by IES are currently severely limited due to insufficient funding and chronic understaffing within the agency. In 2021 and 2022, NCSER was unable to fund all the

grant applications rated outstanding or excellent due to a lack of sufficient funds. In addition, IES announced last spring that the Institute would not be issuing three of their grant competitions, including the main Education Research Grants competition due to a lack of funding. If grant competitions are not held that means that research cannot be conducted to further our knowledge base to improve and strengthen our country's education system – principals, teachers and most importantly students lose out.

Education research provides the bedrock of knowledge used by educators to help preK-12 students and those seeking a postsecondary education succeed. Increases provided to IES in FY 2024 are critical to support the continued examination of what works and what does not work to further our education system's curricula, instructional techniques and assessments. This additional funding will bolster IES' work in relation to education research overall as well as provide support as the nation continues to help students make up for lost learning time due to COVID-19. Given the importance of developing reliable evidence during this critical time, LEARN is requesting \$900 million for IES overall and \$291.9 million for the RD&D line item within IES.

Equally important to funding for RD&D is an increase in appropriations for research in special education to \$71.6 million. IES funds special education research through NCSER which is the only Federal agency specifically designated to develop and provide evaluations for programs for students with disabilities. NCSER's budget, despite increases in the past few years, is still under its overall level of spending in FY2011. Research funded by NCSER provides special educators and administrators evidence-based resources that improve academic outcomes for children with or at risk of disabilities. Special education students were one of several populations of students that were dramatically impacted by the change in schooling due to COVID-19. Additional funding for NCSER is necessary to support data and evidence-based resources that will ensure a strong recovery for these students.

While LEARN is a consistent advocate for funding for IES, other prominent experts have also expressed concern over the relatively small amount of funding being provided to IES compared to other Federal research agencies. In a 2022 National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) report titled "[The Future of Education Research at IES](#)," a diverse panel of 17 experts in the field stated that Congress should re-examine the IES budget as it is currently severely underfunded despite the continuously expanding work of IES. After hours of research and discussion, the panel recognized that IES funding "does not appear to be on par with that of other scientific funding agencies," such as NIH or the National Science Foundation. LEARN urges the Subcommittee to carefully evaluate this call for additional appropriations from this trusted body.

### **NICHD and NIMH**

There are also critical education research programs within NIH that need additional support if we are to expand evidence-based knowledge in education. Specifically, we believe two NIH programs – NICHD and NIMH – require strong Federal funding in FY2024. Both programs provide critical funding to investigate the science behind learning and development, particularly for vulnerable student groups. For NICHD, LEARN supports an increase in funding to \$1.87 billion. This increase will ensure that researchers can build on the knowledge already gained,

evaluate what works best in treating developmental disorders and develop new research-based strategies to improve students' learning and development. Additionally, this level of funding will support NICHD's efforts to understand the long-term effects of COVID-19 on key at-risk populations, including the cognitive development of children and adolescents.

LEARN also supports an increase in funding for NIMH to \$2.54 billion. This increase will help further understanding of the behavioral, biological and environmental mechanisms necessary for developing interventions to reduce the burden of mental and behavioral disorders and optimize learning and development. At a time when the mental health impact to children and adolescents remains dire following the COVID-19 pandemic, this research is needed more now than ever.

The LEARN Coalition believes that collectively these key investments in education research will drive improvements in schools, teacher and student performance in the coming years, strengthen the nation's education infrastructure and ensure a strong, educated workforce in the long run. Thank you for considering these requests.