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Recommendation for Education Legislation

Approved by the National Board for Education Sciences

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That Congress include the following reforms in the authorizing language of Education Department grant programs, wherever feasible and cost-effective, to advance the use of evidence of effectiveness in decision-making:

- 1. Funding incentives for grant applicants to use program models or strategies (“interventions”) supported by evidence of effectiveness, as judged by IES standards such as those used in the Department’s Investing in Innovation program;**
- 2. Funding to evaluate previously untested but highly-promising interventions, through studies overseen by IES that allow for strong causal conclusions, including randomized controlled trials where appropriate; and**
- 3. Funding incentives for state and local educational agencies to engage in systematic evaluation and improvement of local initiatives, consistent with evidence standards established by IES.**

This explanation is not part of the official recommendation, but is provided here for background.

Background on the NBES Recommendation

The Problem: Rigorous studies of federal education programs, which test the effectiveness of the program as a whole, have shown that many fall short in improving educational outcomes.

Over the past 20 years, there have been seven instances where sizable federal grant programs administered by the U.S. Education Department were evaluated in rigorous – mostly randomized – studies: 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Even Start (twice evaluated), Upward Bound, Student Mentoring, Reading First, and Dropout Prevention. In all seven cases, the evaluations found that the programs produced weak or no positive effects on key outcomes such as student achievement or high school graduation, compared to a usual-services control group. This pattern of results suggests that much of what the Department funds through its major grant programs may not be working as intended.

The Opportunity: Certain interventions *within* these larger programs have been shown effective in rigorous studies. Although rare, their existence suggests that reforms designed to increase their number and use could greatly improve U.S. education. Illustrative examples include:

Success for All in grades K-2 – A school-wide reform program, primarily for high-poverty schools, with a strong focus on reading instruction (shown in a well-conducted randomized controlled trial of 41 schools in 11 states to increase school-wide reading achievement in second grade by 25-30% of a grade level, three years after random assignment). *Success for All has received funding from Department programs such as Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies and the Comprehensive School Reform Program.*

Career Academies – Small learning communities in low-income high schools, offering academic and technical/career courses as well as workplace opportunities (shown in a large, multi-site randomized controlled trial to increase average earnings by \$2200 per year, sustained through eight years post-graduation). *Career Academies have received funding from Department programs such as the Small Learning Communities Program and Vocational Education Basic Grants To States.*

The Precedent: Congress has used this evidence-based approach in a few recently-enacted initiatives in education and other areas.

The initiatives are: the Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Fund; HHS's Evidence-Based Home Visitation Program; HHS's Evidence-Based Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program; the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund; and the Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grants Program.

Conclusion: Evaluations suggest that many Department programs are under-performing. We recommend legislative reforms to improve them through the development and use of rigorous evidence.