

June 14, 2007

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Advisors of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy
FROM: Jon Baron
RE: Update on our work

I've prepared a brief update on recent Coalition activities, for your review. Please let me know if you have questions or would like additional information. Any advice you may have would be much appreciated.

1. The Congressionally-established Academic Competitiveness Council, to which we've been a main advisor on evaluation, has issued an important report calling for evidence-based reforms in federal math and science education programs.

The Council, led by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and comprised of top officials from 13 federal agencies, issued a report in May that includes, as a main element, our Coalition's Hierarchy of Study Designs (see full [report](#), with the [Hierarchy](#) on p. 14). The Hierarchy identifies well-designed randomized controlled trials as the strongest design for evaluating an intervention's effect, and well-matched comparison-group studies as a second-best alternative. Core recommendations of the report include:

(i) "Agencies and the federal government at large should foster knowledge of effective practices through improved evaluation focus[ing] their attention on implementing more rigorous evaluations, consistent with the Hierarchy of evaluation designs" and

(ii) Any funding increases for federal math and science programs should be tied to "a plan for rigorous, independent evaluation" of program activities.

To coordinate implementation of the Council's recommendations across the federal agencies, a new Committee has been established within the Cabinet-level National Science and Technology Council, which will report on its progress in October.

2. Key evidence-based provisions in Congressional legislation have advanced, including: (i) a 2% set-aside for rigorous (preferably randomized) evaluations of strategies to facilitate the re-entry of prisoners into the community; and (ii) a \$10 million initiative for evidence-based nurse visitation.

Specifically, in March the House Judiciary Committee unanimously approved a prisoner re-entry bill that contains a 2% set-aside for evaluations "that include, to the maximum extent possible, random assignment" - a provision we helped develop. The Senate bill contains an identical provision. And last week a House Appropriations Subcommittee approved \$10 million for a new program, included in the President's budget, to fund evidence-based nurse visitation programs such as the [Nurse Family Partnership](#) - also an initiative that we've helped support through our work with OMB and Congress.

- 3. The Education Department's National Board for Education Sciences, on which I serve, has recommended statutory incentives for federal education program grantees to adopt practices or strategies meeting the highest standard of evidence of sizeable, sustained effects.**

The [recommendation](#), drafted jointly with other Board members, is patterned on the evidence-based nurse visitation initiative in the President's FY 08 budget request, discussed in #2 above. We will work with the Board to incorporate this recommendation into the forthcoming reauthorization of No Child Left Behind and other education legislation.

- 4. Education Week published a Coalition-authored commentary - "[Making \[Education\] Policy Work: The Lesson from Medicine](#)." I also represented the Coalition in [testimony](#) before the House Science Committee on the need to rigorously evaluate government strategies to fund technology development.**

The testimony was well received, and a forthcoming National Academy of Sciences report will include our recommendation of rigorous - preferably randomized - evaluations of government strategies to fund the development and commercialization of new technologies by small technology companies.

- 5. In February and May, we piloted a new workshop for public officials and staff, and other stakeholders -- [How To Use Rigorous Evidence About "What Works" To Improve Government Programs](#). Both sessions were very well received.**

The workshops attracted officials from a range of federal agencies - including the Departments of Education, Labor, and HHS, as well as OMB, NIH, GAO, EPA, Indian Health Service, and Office of National Drug Control Policy - as well as state/local agencies and program providers. An encouraging initial result of the workshops is that several agency participants have subsequently partnered with us over a longer period to advance evidence-based reforms in their program area.

- 6. We've recently issued two new publications, as follows:**

- A new addition to our Social Programs That Work [website](#): [Riverside's Great Avenues for Independence \(GAIN\) Program](#) (to quickly move welfare recipients into the workforce): A large, well-designed randomized controlled trial shows sizable, sustained increases in employment and earnings, reduction in welfare dependency, and savings to the government.
- A new addition to the Institute of Education Sciences' What Works Clearinghouse Help Desk: [How to Find a Capable Evaluator to Conduct a Rigorous Evaluation of an Educational Program or Practice: A Brief Guide](#).

I hope this update is helpful, and I will continue to keep you posted on developments. As you know, support for our work has been provided by William T. Grant Foundation, the Jerry Lee Foundation, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and -- for our new guide to finding a capable evaluator -- the Institute of Education Sciences' What Works Clearinghouse.