

The Context of Research-Practice Partnerships

Where did the idea of researchers and practitioners working together come from? Why are researcher-practitioner partnerships important? What do we know about them? What can we learn?

Jill Weber, Education Development Center, Inc.

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PEER

Partnership for Early Education Research

A little about me...

- Former teacher – 7th grade math and 5th grade
- Technology director in Cambridge (K-8) and Salem (6-8)
- Masters in Education; MBA
- Worked for LEXIS/NEXIS for 10 years
- Left for the nonprofit world
 - TERC
 - Education Development Center
- Led regional projects in technology and research

A journey back in time

What was going on in education 30 years ago?

1980s-present

- **Standards and Accountability**

Movement, responding to perceived decline of education and building on basic education movement, calls for and establishes standards to be assessed by standardized tests. Most states establish content and skill standards. The effectiveness of schools and educators at all levels are assessed by standardized tests.

1981

Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act, revision of ESEA, addresses concerns about waste, inefficiency, and bureaucracy. Some federal funds consolidated into block grants to the states, assuring greater state control over spending.

1983

A Nation at Risk: The Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. President Reagan's Department of Education report finds inadequate or declining achievement scores, graduation rates, expectations of students, and focus on academics. Criticizes absence of standards and calls for major reforms.

1985 And 1986

Charter schools movement, begun in 1985, grows through the 1990s, with 40 states plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia having passed charter school legislation by 2004.

A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the Twenty-First Century, sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, calls for national teacher standards, restructuring of schools, increased teacher salaries, and aid for minorities becoming teachers. (1986)

1988 and 1989

NAEP revised to authorize state-by-state samples and reporting of results. (1988)

National Education Summit convened by President Bush and the National Governors' Association at Charlottesville, VA. First statement of National Goals for Education approved. (1989)

1991

America 2000. Bush administration proposal for national standards, national standardized testing, and involvement of researchers, business, and labor in curriculum development. America 2000 Act not passed, but funds authorized for supporting voluntary national curriculum standards.

Federal-State Education Policy Chronology 1980-1989

sifepp.nysed.gov

Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR)

CCSR was created in 1990 after the passage of the Chicago School Reform Act that decentralized governance of the city's public schools. Researchers at the University of Chicago joined with researchers from the school district and other organizations to form CCSR with the imperative to study this landmark restructuring and its long-term effects. It has undertaken research on many of the city's school reform efforts, some of which have been embraced by other cities as well, serving to inform broader national movements in public education.



CCSR – the model

“The research... the Consortium on Chicago School Research produced was like a compass for those of us who were working so hard to reform the schools there.”

—Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education and former CEO of Chicago Public Schools

UCHICAGOCCSR
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CHICAGO
CONSORTIUM ON CHICAGO
SCHOOL RESEARCH

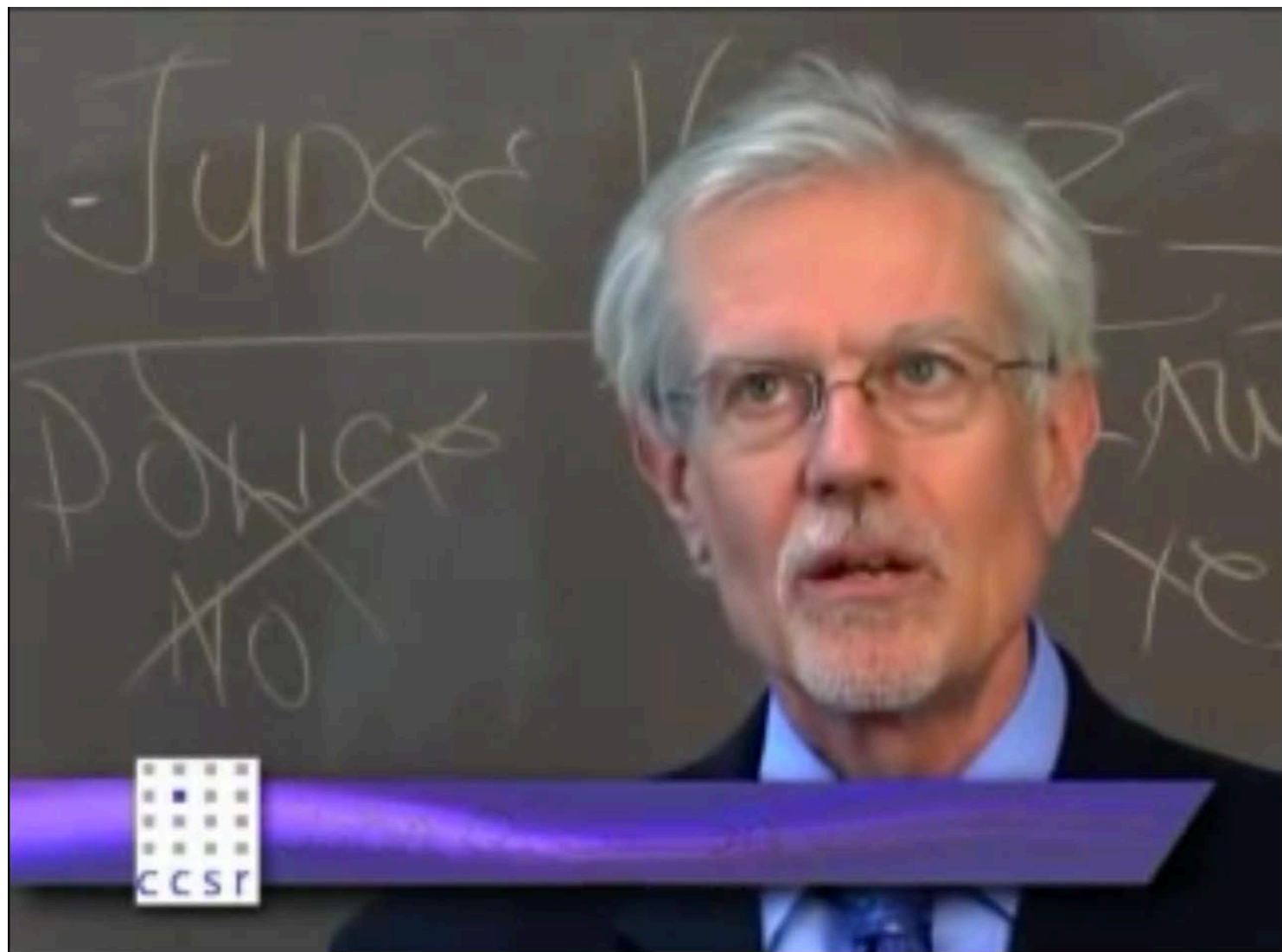
CCSR – Stakeholder engagement

A number of features distinguish CCSR from other, more typical research organizations: our comprehensive data archive, a focus on one place—Chicago, our engagement with a diverse group of stakeholders, a wide range of methods and multiple investigators, and our commitment to sharing research findings with diverse publics.

CCSR – Capacity-building

CCSR is viewed as making important contributions to school reform, both through the findings and implications of specific research studies and more broadly by improving the capacity of the district to use data, build effective strategies, and evaluate progress.

In their own words...



In the meantime – in Washington DC... interest in research is growing

- The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 established the Institute of Education Sciences within the US Department of Education
- The mission of IES is to provide rigorous evidence on which to ground education practice and policy.
- \$200 million budget; 200 staff
- Raised the bar for all education research and evaluation
 - Conducts peer-reviewed scientific studies
 - High level of rigor
 - Studies seek answers on what works for students
 - Grants for the development and use of state longitudinal data systems
 - CT awarded grant in 2005 and 2009
- Funds the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs)
 - REL Northeast and Islands

H.R. 3801-3 - The research portion of ESEA

- Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA) established IES and defines:
 - **Applied research** – specifically directed to the advancement of practice in the field of education
 - **Development** – systematic use of knowledge or understanding gained from the findings of scientifically valid research
 - **Dissemination** – communication and transfer of the results of scientifically-based research, statistics and evaluations, in forms that are understandable, easily accessible, and usable for the improvement of educational practice by practitioners

First Director of IES – Grover (Russ) Whitehurst

- Emphasis on rigor – many said at the expense of relevance
- Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) were his hallmark
- Fought to increase the research budget in ED
 - Only 1%
 - Compared to 40%+ in other agencies (health, agriculture)



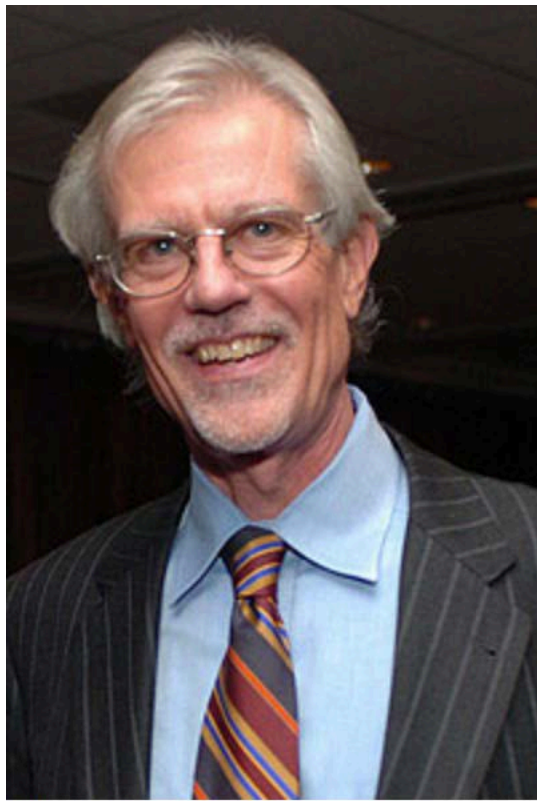
Emphasis on research-based practice

“Fifth, policymakers have unrealistic timelines for findings from research and evaluation and low tolerance for expressions of ignorance from the research community. “Just tell me what to do and I’ll do it,” is a frequent refrain. If the response is, “research hasn’t produced any answers to date,” the reaction is that the research enterprise must be flawed if it hasn’t produced solutions to important education problems. A frequent next step is for policymakers who are frustrated by lack of direction from harder nosed members of the research community to turn to some entity or another to spin “research-based” answers from the flimsiest of empirical threads.”

Fought for investments in educational research

“What we’re about requires a transformation in the way society carries out education decision-making. We need to become a learning society, a society that plans and invests in learning how to improve its education programs by turning to rigorous evidence when it is available, and by embedding evaluation into programs and policies that can’t wait for a strong research base. The challenge of becoming a learning society involves striking a balance between the need to convince ourselves that we know enough to take action while acknowledging that the evidence upon which we are basing our decisions is incomplete and, indeed, may be wrong.”

From Chicago to Washington DC



John Q. Easton

In 2009 John Easton moved from his position as the Director of CCSR to become the Director of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the research arm of the US Department of Education.

Some feared he would sacrifice Whitehurst's emphasis on rigor for a swing toward relevance only.

Easton brings the CCSR model to IES (and Duncan)

“Arne, we at IES look forward to helping you and the nation understand how your new education initiatives contribute to student learning and school improvement. It is the work of all of us in this room to bring research evidence to bear on the critical issues facing both policy makers and practitioners across the country.”

Director's Remarks: IES Research Conference, 2009

“We know that IES sponsors top notch research – IES has earned its reputation. Our (*researchers*) greater challenge is in working better with practitioners and policymakers to use the research to make schools better places where students learn more and have greater opportunities for success in life.”

Director's Remarks: IES Research Conference, 2009

“How do we do that? First, let me say that I do not think that researchers will ever have all the answers and be able to tell policymakers and practitioners what to do to solve their myriad problems.”

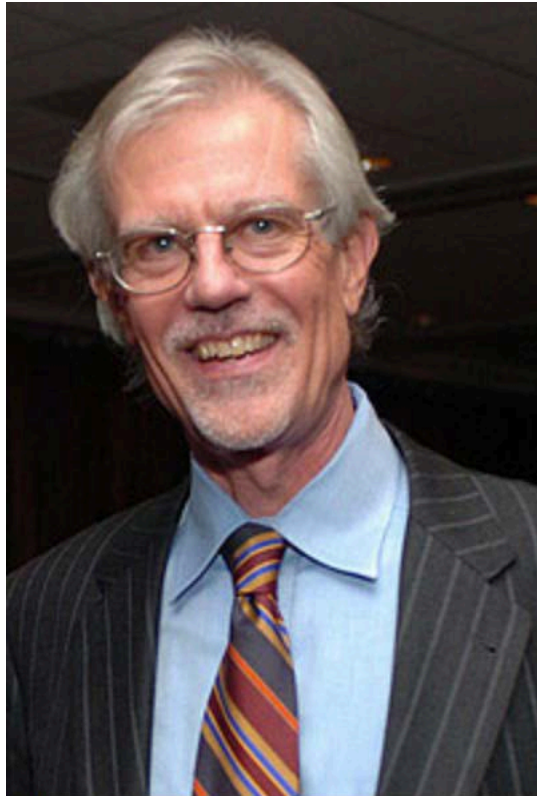
Director's Remarks: IES Research Conference, 2009

“I think it means working in close partnership together, and creating new relationships where the influences are reciprocal, so that researchers are guided by the problems and concerns of the practitioners and policymakers.”

Director's Remarks: IES Research Conference, 2009

“We call this a ‘capacity-building approach’ to research, where researchers take on non-traditional roles as interactive participants in building knowledge about improving student success in school. This approach depends heavily on high quality data, ongoing public reporting, and a commitment to openness.”

Making research more relevant

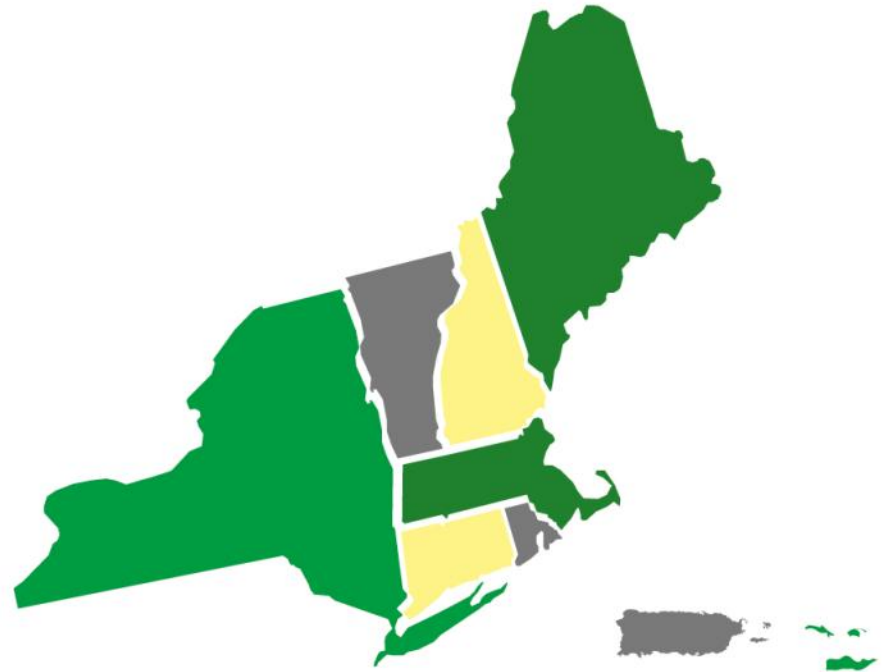


John Q. Easton

Remarks from American
Educational Research
Association (AERA)
Conference, 2013

Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs)

- 10 RELs across the country
- Help states and districts use research and data to inform policy and practice with the goal of improving student outcomes
- REL Northeast and Islands
 - Connecticut
 - Maine
 - Massachusetts
 - New Hampshire
 - New York
 - Puerto Rico
 - Rhode Island
 - US Virgin Islands
 - Vermont



Work in partnership with stakeholders

- Emphasis shift *away* from large-scale, long RCTs
- Researchers, practitioners and policymakers working together
- John Easton's "fingerprint" on RFP and in the conduct of the work
- Majority of the work is to be done through "Research Alliances"

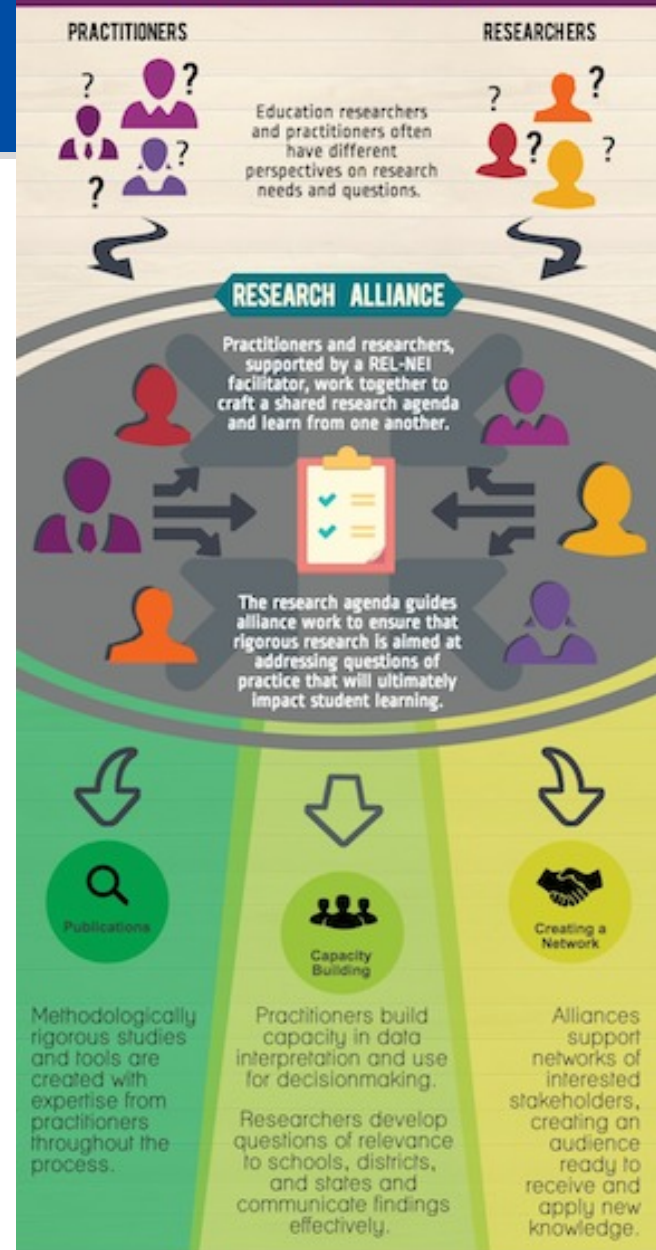
“When education stakeholders actually have a stake in the research itself, they are more likely to trust it, believe it and take it up.”

-Easton, Opening remarks to
REL Directors, 2012

What is a Research Alliance?



What's a REL Northeast & Islands Research Alliance?



Eight Research Alliances in REL-NEI

- Northeast College and Career Readiness
- Early Childhood Education
- Urban School Improvement
- Northeast Educator Effectiveness
- Northeast Rural Districts
- Puerto Rico Dropout Prevention
- English Language Learners
- US Virgin Islands College and Career Readiness

The value of collaboration

“I do believe there’s value in creating the potential to do diverse work that includes research, dissemination, and forming new collaborations to strengthen the potential to be effective at the state and community levels.... We might need to bring a little bit of our own research agenda to understanding collaborations and what makes a collaboration work. Every collaboration has its interests, and the ability to distill all those interests to one that can be a focus, or some agreed-upon interest that can move a practice forward is something that I think we need to be concerned about.... Given that [the alliances] each have different interests, I think there could be collaborations around those who do the hard research and those who can have more of a specialty around interpreting that research and supporting people in the field in various ways, so that the veracity of the understandings are carried out with confidence in the delivery of those designs. I think those are areas that states and school districts still need help.”

-George Coleman

The value of collaboration

High School Principal Dana Brown on Benefits of Research Alliances



-Dana Brown
Principal, Malden, MA High School

Research Alliances create researchable questions

- **What is a researchable question?**
 - Reasonable
 - Appropriate
 - Answerable
 - Specific
- **Where do researchable questions come from?**
 - Questions, concerns, and values of stakeholders
 - Important issues in the field or research literature
 - Professional standards or guidelines
 - Views and knowledge of experts
 - One's own views and judgment

Researchable questions lead to research agendas

- What is a research agenda?
 - Identifies research priorities and questions for group
 - Is coherent
 - Leads to rigorous and relevant research that is actionable and has an audience
 - May include current or future project
- What does a research agenda look like?
 - Linear
 - Topical
 - Building toward a cohesive body of work/knowledge

David Ruff, New England Secondary School Consortium, on Meeting Educators' Needs Through Collaborative Research



Cherry Hill

Research Question

- What is the relationship between teachers' implementation of early learning standards and the evaluation of child learning (through teacher ratings, evaluations, observations) in early childhood education? What is the connection between state early learning standards and the Common Core State Standards?



Research Question

- What is the relationship between state standards and teachers' instructional and assessment practices?

Research Questions

- What is the infrastructure needed to support behavior change?
- What is the relationship between children's demographic and academic characteristics and their dosage and classroom quality?
- What is the interaction between dosage and quality and child outcomes?

Research Questions

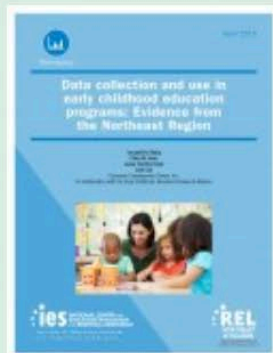
- What is the relationship between kindergarten entry assessments with educational practices and child outcomes?
- What are the strategies used to engage families in the child assessment process?
- What percent of the expected trajectories of growth in reading, mathematics, and social skills from preschool to grade 3 can be attributed to children's early childhood education experiences?
- How do pre-school teachers and administrators currently use data on early childhood experiences and outcomes and how would they like to use it?

Early Childhood Education Research Alliance

The broad vision of the Early Childhood Education Research Alliance is to bring together the region's early childhood stakeholders in the united pursuit of improving early childhood programming and children's outcomes through research- and evidence-based practices. The alliance will co-create a research agenda that focuses on standards, practices, and assessment in early childhood education. View our recent publication:

- [Data Collection and Use in Early Childhood Programs: Evidence from the Northeast Region • Stated Briefly](#)
- [Early Childhood Educator and Administrator Surveys](#)

News



Data Collection and Use in Early Childhood Education Programs: Evidence from the Northeast Region

Research Alliance: Early Childhood Education Research Alliance Principal Investigator: Jacqueline Zweig Overview: Early childhood education programs face increasing...

Early Childhood Educator and Administrator Surveys



Research Alliance: [Early Childhood Education Research Alliance](#)

Overview: When the Early Childhood Education Research Alliance (ECEA) created its research agenda, focusing on standards and assessments in early childhood education, members identified a gap in understanding among states and in the field around assessment use and standards implementation. Because states and jurisdictions lack data about the implementation of standards, the use of assessments, and the infrastructure to support both in early childhood settings, ECEA developed tools to collect and analyze this information.

The power of partnerships



EARLY CHILDHOOD Educator & Administrator SURVEYS ALLIANCE MEMBER COMMENT

Partnerships & IES Priorities

IES seeks to...

- encourage education researchers to develop partnerships with stakeholder groups to advance relevance of research and usability of its findings for day-to-day work of education practitioners and policymakers
- increase capacity of education policymakers and practitioners to use knowledge generated from high quality data analysis, research, and evaluation through a wide variety of communication and outreach strategies

(See <http://ies.ed.gov/director/board/priorities.asp>)

Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research

- Promote joint research by research institutions and SEAs/LEAs
 - On education issues of key importance to SEAs/LEAs
 - That will directly contribute to SEA/LEA program and policy decisions
 - Provide an opportunity to develop the partnership through initial research activities as well as develop a longer-term research plan
- Foster longer-term research partnerships
 - Provide and support the use of rigorous research-based evidence in decision-making
 - Continue practitioner input into research agenda

What should the partnerships do during the grant?

Broadly, the partnerships should...

- Identify an education issue with important implications for improving student achievement that is of high priority for the education agency
- Carry out initial research regarding the education issue
- Develop a plan for further research on the issue

You are part of a select group

- A number of researcher-practitioner partnerships exist
 - CCSR
 - San Diego
 - Denver
 - NYC
 - Other fields (criminal justice, health)
- Growing rapidly in popularity
 - 81,000+ Google hits
- W.T. Grant studying these structures

Understanding the Use of Research Evidence

How do policymakers, administrators, and service providers use research evidence? What role does it play in decision-making about programs, policies, and practices that can improve the lives of young people? These questions and others lie at the heart of this research initiative, launched in 2009. Although the research community has done a great deal to strengthen the rigor of research and to increase its supply, a better understanding of how policymakers and practitioners use research evidence may allow research to have a greater impact.

What are we all learning?

In order to have successful researcher-practitioner partnerships, four things seem to hold true:

- Ask the questions you want to have answered
- Choose a good research partner
- Be ready to be surprised
- Use the findings and knowledge in your work and make improvements based on continuous feedback

A parting thought...



Thank you!

Good luck and have fun!

