

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Statement by

**Grover J. (Russ) Whitehurst, Director
Institute of Education Sciences**

on

**Fiscal Year 2008 Request for the
Institute of Education Sciences**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before you to discuss the 2008 budget request for the Institute of Education Sciences. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education was authorized by the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA). The mission of IES, broadly characterized, is to provide rigorous evidence on education and to encourage its use. My office has the bold, some would say audacious, goal of transforming education in America to an evidence-based enterprise. I hope within my lifetime to see an education system in which policymakers and educators do not struggle with difficult choices that will affect the lives of thousands of children in the absence of relevant data or without concern for relevant data. I hope within my lifetime to see an education system in which every student and every student's parent has the reasonable assurance that I and the members of this Committee have when we get on a plane on a typical day – that the system is good enough to get us where we need to go.

We are a long way from an education system that is good enough, as indicated by numerous reports from my office on low levels of academic performance of large numbers of U.S. students. For example, we released a National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) report 3 weeks ago showing that only 35 percent of the Nation's high school seniors are proficient in reading, down from 40 percent in 1992. And these are the students who make it to 12th grade: 26 percent of students in public schools do not graduate from high school on time. Of those students who make a transition to college, 28 percent require remedial coursework. These are not numbers of which we as a Nation should be proud or that should make us confident of our prospects in an increasingly global and competitive economy. Behind these

dreary statistics are the lives of millions of children who will grow into adulthood bearing the burden and the consequences of being poorly educated.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I respectfully submit that we are not going to achieve substantial improvements in American education just by caring more or spending more, though certainly caring and funding are prerequisites. We will only achieve breakthroughs if we can learn systematically what works and what does not, and if we establish the type of research-based, evidence-based culture and infrastructure in education that exists in other areas of the Nation's endeavors.

We are making progress in that regard, and I am proud of what the Institute of Education Sciences has been able to contribute in the 4 years of its existence. Someone was recently quoted in a newspaper article as saying about IES, "Nothing over there is like it used to be." I am not sure if that was intended as a compliment, but I took it as such. We are staffed with world-class researchers, evaluators, and statisticians. We have clear priorities that are guiding focused investments. We have very high standards for what we fund and what we publish. We are relentlessly non-partisan. And, most importantly, we are generating important results. I will be sending a biennial report on IES to this Committee within the next couple of weeks that will highlight some of those results.

IES' budget is relatively small, about 1 percent of the Department of Education's discretionary budget, given what I think and hope you will agree is our critical mission. In contrast, the National Institutes of Health are funded at 42 percent of the discretionary budget of the Department of Health and Human Services. I think of the Institute of Education Sciences as the "Little Engine That Could." We've have got a long and heavy train to pull over the mountain and we're only a small engine. But -- We think we can. We will need the continued support of this Committee to get to the top of the grade.

The Administration's 2008 budget request for the Institute of Education Sciences is \$594 million. This total includes \$244 million for our research and dissemination activities, including \$81 million specifically focused on special education; \$65 million for the regional educational laboratories; \$119 million for statistics; \$117 million for the National Assessment of Educational Progress; and \$49 million for Statewide data systems. The request represents an increase of almost 15 percent over our

final 2007 funding level and includes new funding for four projects. Let me briefly describe the four projects for which we are requesting funding increments. Each and all are critical elements in bringing better evidence to bear on the topic to which I was alluding in the statistics I presented at the outset of my presentation: ensuring that students finish high school academically prepared for work and college.

Assessment – 12th Grade State NAEP

We are requesting funds to support NAEP assessments at the State level for 12th grade reading and mathematics. Currently our 12th grade assessments are designed to provide statistics only for the Nation as a whole. Education policies that affect student learning and readiness for college are largely set at the State level. While it is relevant and interesting to know how 12th graders are doing nationally, that does not give Wisconsin and New York and California the evidence they need on how well prepared their high school graduates are for further education and the workforce. State-by-State NAEP results in 12th grade would be a powerful lever for improvement, just as State representative NAEP results at the 4th and 8th grade have been.

Statistics–High School Longitudinal Study

We are proposing a new secondary longitudinal study, the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009. The study will follow a 9th grade cohort through high school and college. It will provide ongoing, detailed information about the educational experiences of high school students, their parents, teachers, and schools, and will follow students as they make major transitions from high school to postsecondary education or work. The study is critical for identifying associations between education variables and short- and long-term outcomes in students' lives. This study will have a special focus on linking curriculum and teacher quality with student outcomes in mathematics and science, and on how students and their parents gather and use information to plan for college.

Statewide Longitudinal Data System Grants

In November of 2005, IES awarded grants to 14 States to create or enhance Statewide longitudinal data systems in order to efficiently and accurately manage, analyze, disaggregate, and use individual student data from public schools. A second grant competition will result in awards to a substantial number of additional States in 2007. The requested increase in funding will cover the continuation costs of the 2007 awards and allow for more awards in 2008.

Longitudinal data systems enable States and school districts to look at changes in student achievement from year to year. Many systems will also include data on the preparation and training of teachers and on programs used in schools and classrooms. These rich data will allow policymakers, educators, and researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of various initiatives and to use data for teaching and learning. For example, one State is using its longitudinal data system to provide detailed feedback from Statewide student assessments to teachers, principals, and districts to support their instructional decisions. Another State is using its system to examine the effects of changes in promotion policies.

I believe that longitudinal data systems represent one of the most powerful and practical tools for learning about how schools are performing and how they can be improved. The invention of the electron microscope in the 1930s permitted breakthroughs in our understanding of biology and physics by permitting researchers to see what they had heretofore only been able to imagine. Longitudinal data systems can have similar effects in education.

Statistics—Postsecondary Student Level Data System Pilot

My expression of enthusiasm for longitudinal data systems is an appropriate segue into a description of our proposal for a pilot study of a postsecondary longitudinal data system. Our current annual data collection on the students, staff, finances, student aid, and graduation rates of postsecondary institutions is the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Individual institutions report data to us on

an aggregate basis, e.g., the total number of students who enrolled and the total number who graduated. IPEDS has been the Nation's principal information resource on postsecondary education for many years. We are proud of the job we do in managing it. But there are notable gaps and problems and they are worsening. Institutions only report to us data on full-time, first-time, degree- or certificate-seeking students in a particular year, by race/ethnicity and gender. No data are available on time to degree for individual students. Nor are data available by family income. Students who transfer and graduate from a subsequent institution are not counted in the statistics; students who enroll on a part-time basis are not counted in the statistics; students who start, drop out, and then restart are not counted in the statistics.

In other words, we can tell you almost anything you want to know about traditional college students and the institutions that serve them. Yet research has shown that 73 percent of today's postsecondary students are nontraditional, with characteristics such as part-time attendance and delayed enrollment. Of those who receive a bachelor's degree, 58 percent enroll in more than one institution. How can States, Congress, the public, and prospective students make informed decisions about institutions that serve an appreciable number of non-traditional students (and that is all but the elite private universities) with data that ignore these students? They can't. IPEDS needs to be fixed.

One possible fix would be to ask for more detailed information. Institutions would still submit data to us in aggregates, but the aggregates would be much smaller slices. For example, every Title IV institution could be required to calculate and submit net price for different categories of students in different programs. The downside would be a large increase in the data collection burden on institutions and we still would not have addressed many of the issues raised by nontraditional students. For example, most individual institutions have no way of knowing whether a student who is no longer enrolled and did not graduate dropped out or transferred or will restart.

Another approach, one we think will ultimately be more efficient and more accurate, is a student level data system. Such a system would be just like the K-12 Statewide longitudinal data systems that Congress has already authorized and funded, with the notable exception that it would be Nationwide rather than Statewide. Statewide systems will suffice for K-12 education because K-12 education is

predominantly a public enterprise that is managed within State boundaries. A relatively small proportion of students within that enterprise cross State borders or co-enroll or switch among schools that are not part of connected administrative data systems. But the more than 6,600 public and private postsecondary institutions in the U.S. are national in scope. Information on these institutions and the many non-traditional students they serve cannot be captured accurately by separate Statewide systems. My son went to high school in New York and considered colleges in 13 other States before settling on one in Georgia.

A national longitudinal data system would allow us to calculate everything now in IPEDS, plus critical information on graduation and transfer rates, time to degree, net prices, persistence, transfer, and graduation by student characteristics. Institutions could use these data to address their own questions and policymakers could design sophisticated accountability systems using it. After a transition phase it should be much less burdensome on institutions than the present system, because they would no longer have to do their own calculations to produce aggregate reports.

There is nothing exotic about a student level data system. Today, 39 States have at least one such system at the postsecondary level. Many governmental and other organizations also maintain student-level systems on specific groups of students. For example, the National Student Loan Data System compiles information on all recipients of Federal student loans, including verification of enrollment by academic term. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) collects student level data on 1,800 institutions with Division I, II, or III varsity athletic programs, and about 2,800 colleges and universities currently contract with the National Student Clearinghouse to perform enrollment verification and other services using student level data uploaded from member institutions.

The challenges to redesigning IPEDS as a student level data system are primarily in two areas. The first is burden on smaller institutions that may have to update their data systems. The second is privacy and confidentiality.

We are proposing funding for a pilot study that would support the design of a new system, allow estimation of costs at the institutional level, and address privacy issues. The funding would be used to support one or more consortia of States to develop and test a system. Funds would be distributed through

a competitive grant program as has been done for the Statewide longitudinal K-12 data systems. No State or institution would be compelled to participate in the pilot, and Congress would have to authorize us to move beyond the pilot to national implementation.

I am fully aware of the controversies surrounding a national student level data system. I treat every concern seriously, but I think the most important is privacy. There are legitimate reasons to be concerned about the Federal Government holding data on the educational progress of every postsecondary student in America. The least of these reasons, in my view, is that IES computer systems could be compromised. While this happens almost routinely at individual postsecondary institutions, it has never happened at IES. We are very good at protecting the data in our computers. The bigger concern is that such a national data system would be used for purposes for which it was not originally intended, e.g., law enforcement or national security.

One possible answer to both concerns is to create a national student level longitudinal data system that does not contain students' names, addresses, or social security numbers at the Federal level and in which the data cannot be linked by the Federal Government back to named students. This could be accomplished by having individual postsecondary institutions send student-level data to a non-governmental third party as they send data now, for example, to the NCAA and the National Student Clearinghouse. The third party would strip off the personally identifiable information such as the name and social security number and forward the de-identified data to us. Thus the information we obtain would tell us everything we need to know about the student academically but not who he or she is.

While such a system is conceptually simple and has direct parallels in our very secure system of electronic banking and stock transactions, there are many options and many details that would have to be worked out. That is why we need a pilot – to determine how to collect meaningful, privacy-protected data at a reasonable cost and effort.

Thank you for your attention and your interest in the budget of the Institute of Education Sciences. I will be pleased to respond to your questions.