

*“Toward a New Federal Role in Education R&D:
Linking Research, Innovation, Policy and Practice”*

An Aug. 12 presentation at the “Unleashing Knowledge and Innovation for the Next Generation of Learning,” a national summit convened by Knowledge Alliance/Center for Knowledge Use, the Stupski Foundation and West Wind Education Policy.

Good morning. Thanks for this opportunity, Jim. I’m pleased to be here with so many long time friends and colleagues and happy to meet new people, new friends and new colleagues.

I’ve been on the job at IES for about 10 weeks now, and I’m feeling more comfortable, even as the challenges seem to grow daily. You heard my colleague Jim Shelton talk on Monday night about the many new and bold initiatives in the department of education and the huge investments that we are making to improve schools across the country.

These bring up several big questions: What are going to learn from all of these new efforts that will pay off in the long run? And, equally important, what are we going to learn in the short run to build on the successes and do damage control where we have problems? Jim summed up these questions for me on Monday night when he asked, “how does IES fit into this framework?”

I won’t attempt to answer that one now, but I would like to share some of my thoughts about IES. Since I’ve been there, I’ve been building a set of personal goals what I hope to

accomplish at the institute. It's too early to call this an IES vision, but I think over time that's what I'm aiming for. Let me share with you five of these goals.

I'm going to start with the one that I know the least about, but which you know the most and is the reason we are all here this week:

We need to build stronger and more rigorous, iterative R&D processes that address problems of practice and that are jointly driven by researchers and practitioners. This is why everyone is here this week. I'm still in the early phases of learning about what this means, but look forward to your collective wisdom on how to do this, and help in figuring out IES's role in doing it. It didn't escape me that my long-term friend, mentor and collaborator Tony Bryk advocates for a strong federal role in this work.

I must say that much of this is new to me, and as I've mentioned to several people here, I'm still having some trouble understanding some of these concepts.

IES has gained a tremendous reputation over the past several years for conducting rigorous research. Some will say that IES is single-handedly responsible for a major shift across the country in the quality of educational research, developing high standards for conducting the research, and in supporting both research and training across the country. IES must continue emphasis on rigorous research and evaluation; but, as many people have observed, we got the "rigor" part right, now let's focus on relevance and

usability, and perhaps extend the emphasis on rigor beyond methodology. One step for moving in this direction is by creating stronger links with both practitioners and policy-makers.

Before moving to Washington two months ago, I spent my entire career in Chicago conducting data analysis, research, and evaluations intended to assist school reform and improvement.. For the past 12 years I worked at the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which has gained a national reputation for conducting research that speaks directly to the needs of practitioners and policy makers. We did this by planning our research agenda in consultation with local stakeholders, and by vetting our designs, analyses, findings, and especially the interpretations of the findings carefully with the intended users, who therefore had a greater stake in actually making use of the findings.

My third goal is to shift the conversation away from “disseminating” research findings, to facilitating the use of research. The key to this difference is, again, a closer partnership with practitioners and policy makers, and the commitment on the part of researchers to assist in school improvement efforts.

The fourth area where I think IES needs to focus is in developing a stronger knowledge base of how schools and school districts can improve. I am not at all convinced that good schools are simply accretions of discrete programs, practices and interventions – no matter how innovative. Instead, they are learning organizations that use data for

continuous improvement, for making good decisions and for many changes, tweaks and revisions to their practices. Let's foster and develop schools and districts as learning organizations and simultaneously study how this happens, where and under what conditions.

Finally, we should be helping to build capacity of LEAs/SEAs to conduct research, evaluate their programs and priorities and use their longitudinal data systems. Many people in these systems have an abundance of questions that can be answered with descriptive data AND they have increasingly good data and will have even more with the SLDSs. Let's support them in these efforts to provide timely descriptive and analytic feedback to schools and their leaders