

Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

Technical Working Group Summary | December 7, 2020

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Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

Technical Working Group (TWG) Meeting

December 7, 2020

National Center for Education Research

Institute of Education Sciences

U.S. Department of Education

Washington, D.C.

This meeting summary was prepared by Corinne Alfeld and Elizabeth Albro of the National Center for Education Research (NCER), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), drawing on notes and a short summary from Robin Pu Yigh (under JDC Events' contract ED-IES-D-0003), as well as notes taken by IES program officers Sarah Brasiel, Helyn Kim, Allen Ruby, Katherine Taylor, and Bennett Lunn. The views expressed in this document reflect individual and collective opinions and judgments of the presenters and participants at the Technical Working Group meeting and are not necessarily those of IES or the U.S. Department of Education.

Table of Contents

Technical Working Group Members	3
Invited Representatives from Education Policy/Leadership Organizations	3
Invited Representatives from Education Policy Research	3
Institute of Education Sciences Staff	4
Introduction	5
What Are High Priority Education Policy Issues to be Researched?	7
<i>Understanding and Addressing Inequity in Education Systems</i>	8
<i>Improving Use of and Access to Education Technology and High-Quality Online Instruction</i> ..	8
<i>Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Teaching Workforce</i>	9
<i>Providing Access to Student and Educator Mental Health Supports</i>	10
<i>Engaging and Re-Engaging Students</i>	10
<i>Preparing K-12 Students for Careers</i>	11
<i>Modernizing Assessments</i>	11
<i>Improving Data-Driven Decision-Making in Schools</i>	12
<i>Creating Adaptive Education Systems</i>	13
How Can NCER Better Support Research on Top Education Systems/Policy Issues?	14
<i>Support a Systems Approach to Systems and Policy Research</i>	14
<i>Encourage Partnerships with Key Stakeholders</i>	14
<i>Support Rapid Research to Practice Efforts</i>	15
<i>Disseminate Information that is Useful to Policymakers</i>	15
<i>Attend to Equity in Grantmaking and Research Focus</i>	16
<i>Encourage and Provide Resources and Incentives for Policy-Relevant Research</i>	17
Concluding Recommendations	18
Virtual Meeting Agenda	19

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

Technical Working Group Members

Invited Representatives from Education Policy/Leadership Organizations

Raymond C. Hart, Director of Research, Council of Great City Schools

Robin Lake, Director, Center for Reinventing Public Education

Monica Martinez, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Learning Policy Institute

Scott Norton, Deputy Executive Director of Programs, Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

Gregg Seaton, Associate Director, Pathways to Prosperity Network, JFF

Allison Socol, Assistant Director of P12 Policy, Education Trust

Jennifer Thomsen, Director of the Knowledge and Research Center, Education Commission of the States (ECS)

Invited Representatives from Education Policy Research

Bart Epstein, Chief Executive Officer, EdTech Evidence Exchange

Kara Finnigan, Professor of Educational Leadership, University of Rochester

Lillian Lowery, Vice President & Chief Operating Officer for Student and Teacher Assessment, Educational Testing Service

LaShawn Richburg-Hayes, Vice President of Education, Insight Policy Research, Inc.

Marguerite Roza, Professor and Director of the Edunomics Lab, Georgetown University

Nate Schwartz, Professor of Practice, Annenberg Institute of School Reform, Brown University

Ruth Lopez-Turley, Professor and Director of the Houston Education Research Consortium, Rice University

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Institute of Education Sciences Staff

Mark Schneider, Director
Institute of Education Sciences

Elizabeth Albro, Commissioner
National Center for Education Research

Joan McLaughlin, Commissioner
National Center for Special Education Research

Allen Ruby, Associate Commissioner
National Center for Education Research

Corinne Alfeld, Program Officer – Improving Education Systems
National Center for Education Research

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

Introduction

On December 7, 2020, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) National Center for Education Research (NCER) convened a technical working group (TWG) of education policy leaders and researchers to discuss strategies for [improving K-12 education systems and policy research](#) funded by NCER. The purpose of the meeting was to request input from participants on three topics: 1) priority issues for education policy leaders, 2) priority issues for education researchers, and 3) how researchers can best address policymakers' needs. NCER was especially interested in recommended approaches for engaging policymakers in its work and how best to disseminate research findings to policymakers.

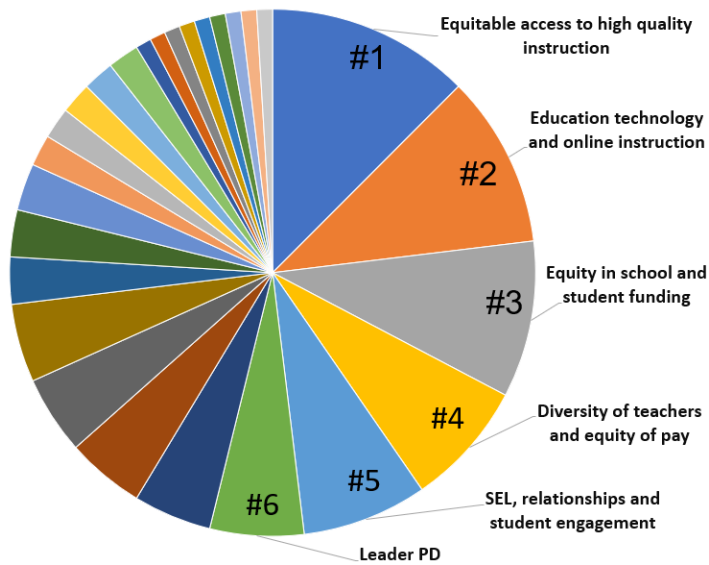
Prior to the meeting, NCER provided TWG members with discussion questions and prompts regarding priority K-12 education policy issues, policy information needs, and research dissemination strategies. NCER requested that TWG members submit pre-meeting responses in writing.

- **Education Policy Leader Prompt:** *From your vantage point as a leader in the education policy space, identify in rank order the most pressing issues facing SEAs, LEAs, and their schools. How are SEAs and LEAs currently addressing these issues? What information do they need? What are the most useful ways to provide research findings to education leaders?*
- **Education Researcher Prompt:** *From your vantage point as an education researcher, identify in rank order the most pressing issues facing the SEAs and LEAs with whom you have worked. What research findings are available to education leaders to help them address these issues? What additional research is necessary to inform decision-making by education leaders about these issues? What are the most useful ways to share research findings with education leaders?*

NCER staff reviewed and compiled these pre-work responses to identify themes and inform discussion facilitation. When asked to identify what policy topics need evidence to inform their decision making, policy leaders and researchers identified over 20 issues of pressing concern. The issues reflected topics that were of concern throughout 2020 and remained key issues throughout 2021. The top-identified education policy issues, with at least 3 nominations across both policy leader and researcher groups are shown in the two Figures below.

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

Top Ed Policy Issues, Ranked by Priority, All TWG Members



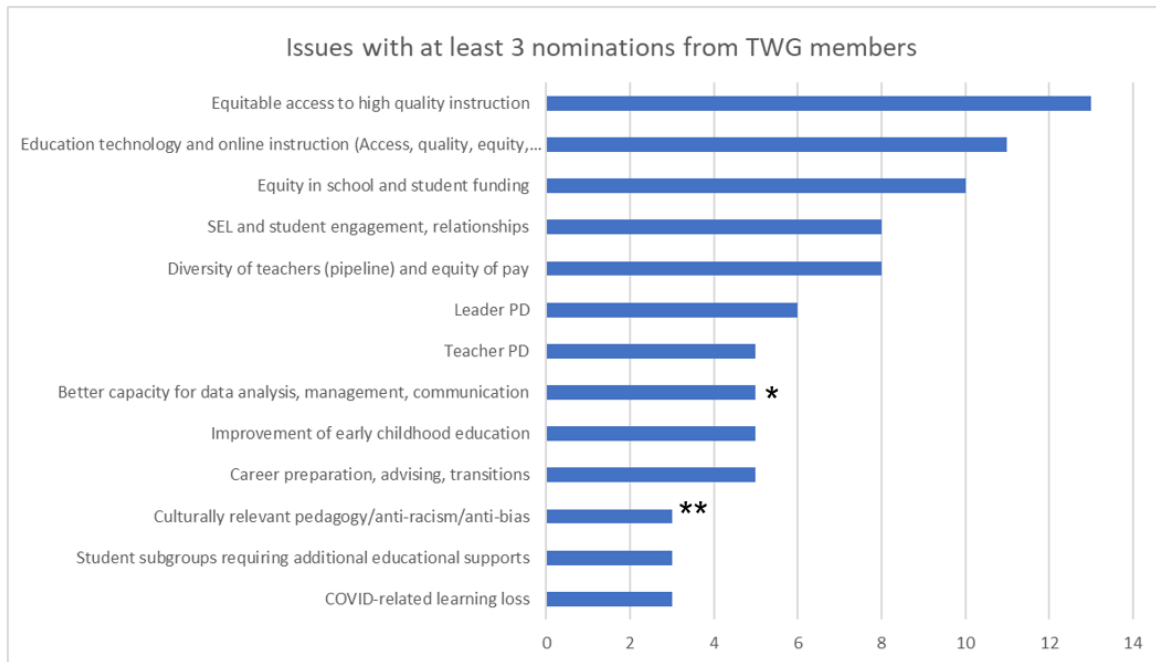
Other issues mentioned

- Career preparation, advising, transitions
- Improvement of early childhood education
- Better capacity for data analysis, management, communication
- Teacher PD
- COVID-related learning loss
- Student subgroups requiring additional educational supports
- Culturally relevant pedagogy/anti-racism/anti-bias
- Civic education and civic engagement
- Wraparound supports (ed, housing, health)
- Assessing students' needs
- Expanded learning time
- Accountability, tracking of measures
- Reducing costs in a tight economy
- Literacy
- School climate, inequitable discipline
- School transitions
- Work-based learning for students
- School improvements
- School assignment/segregation
- Actionable information
- Student academic supports

Researchers

Policy Leaders

Issues with at least 3 nominations from TWG members



* Only mentioned by Education Researchers

** Only mentioned by Education Leaders

During the meeting, each TWG member briefly described the education policy issues they deemed most pressing and what information policymakers need about these issues. Discussion among the full TWG, and then among small groups determined by members' top issue areas, followed the individual presentations. Finally, the TWG discussed how NCER can best support research and research dissemination to address these issues.

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

This report summarizes key discussion themes and remarks during the TWG meeting, which focused on a subset of the issues identified in the pre-meeting activities. NCER has organized the comments made thematically due to the great extent of agreement across policy leader and researcher recommendations.

IES Director Mark Schneider opened the TWG meeting with an overview of the challenges and key questions associated with education policy and systems work. He posed three broad challenges and provided his preliminary thoughts on each challenge.

- How can IES gain more traction in systems and policy research, since policy and governance control events in schools? He noted that there are different issues and methods needed for research in this area than those used for intervention development.
- How can IES engage policymakers in every phase of its work to support education research? He noted that engaging policymakers has been challenging. For example, IES would like to broaden its discretionary grant review process to include policymakers, but it is often more difficult for policymakers than academic researchers to schedule time to serve as grant reviewers given different responsibilities and priorities for each. He noted that researchers and policymakers use different language to discuss their work, and that while academics are incentivized for disseminating their findings through scientific peer-reviewed publications, policymakers rely on research reports and briefs as they make decisions.
- What are effective strategies for disseminating research findings on issues that matter to policymakers? The Director noted that NCER supports projects initiated by researchers, and by so doing may not be addressing key issues for education agencies. How, he asked, can NCER address issues that are of greatest concern to education agencies – and ensure that education agencies are aware of the relevant evidence being generated via NCER funding?

What Are High Priority Education Policy Issues to be Researched?

Following the brief presentations of the most pressing issues identified by each TWG member, the full group discussed many of them in more depth. This section presents the broad range of issues discussed by the TWG over the course of the day, which did not always align with the issues initially identified. Below are common points made by TWG members about inequity, education technology, recruiting and retaining a diverse teaching workforce, student mental health, student engagement, assessments, career preparation, data, education finance, and the need for education systems to be more adaptive.

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

Understanding and Addressing Inequity in Education Systems

The TWG members agreed that inequity is the most pressing current education issue, and that ensuring equitable access to high quality instruction and resources are key concerns for education systems. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated and revealed systemic inequity, which affects students who are from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds, low-income, or other marginalized groups. TWG members recommended that research consider the intersection of race and poverty in examining students' needs and responses to interventions. Participants asserted that segregation and the resulting concentration of poverty continue to be highly associated with educational inequity. Teachers struggle to teach disadvantaged students, whose challenges go beyond the school day. Many students living in poverty do not have access to safe environments and support outside the school day. Systems need to be built to support students with the most complex needs, leveraging community resources so that the burden is not only on schools. Leveraging assets, such as multiple, coordinated systems of support – including health, economic, and family and community support, potentially delivered via wraparound services – could begin to address societal inequities that affect education outcomes. In order to understand how to overcome systemic inequity, education policy research needs to describe and understand barriers to change in education systems and structures that reinforce inequity. TWG members felt that education research can provide a voice for underserved students and schools by studying, and therefore elevating, such issues. TWG members also recommended that education researchers be trained in how to consider equity throughout the research process, including developing the theory of change, identifying research questions, setting/context, sample, and metric selection; ascertaining data collection procedures; carrying out data analysis (including disaggregation of results), and interpreting data and findings.

Improving Use of and Access to Education Technology and High-Quality Online Instruction

TWG members from both policy and research backgrounds were concerned about education technology, and in particular about inequities in access. With the heavy reliance on online instruction throughout the pandemic, COVID-19 has created new urgency for closing the digital divide. TWG members noted that over 9 million children currently do not have reliable internet access from home. About one-third of households with children and annual incomes of less than \$30,000 do not have high-speed internet connection, which may cause millions of learners to fall further behind in terms of education achievement and attainment. Before the pandemic, there may

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

have been places to go for access to technology and learning opportunities, but those places were closed to protect public health when students might have needed them most. Remote and blended instruction are likely to continue after the pandemic and will be key to catching students up. In addition to understanding how systems support or impede access to education technology, TWG members also noted a need for education research focused on questions of teaching and learning in remote and hybrid environments, including professional development and systems-level support for both teachers and students for using and engaging with technology. Educators – and education leaders - need to know more about how to leverage one-to-one technology, AI, and digital tutors. Critical research questions include examining how technology can help diverse groups of learners, gathering systematic information about how much school districts are spending on technology, understanding how different types of school districts are using technology, and describing how they are prioritizing student technology needs. There is also a need for education leaders to learn from other districts that have been successful with technology use. TWG members noted that all efforts to expand technology use must consider students’ and schools’ safety and privacy.

Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Teaching Workforce

Recruiting and retaining a diverse teacher workforce was raised as a pressing policy issue. TWG members noted that teacher shortages, especially in high poverty districts, have been a concern for years, and that there is a need for evidence on how to make access to high quality teachers more equitable. Opportunities for gathering evidence about this question exist as states are using multiple strategies to meet the need for teachers, including financial support and incentives; “grow your own” programs that recruit high school and college students; and induction, mentoring, and professional development opportunities (including online). As these strategies are implemented, researchers could examine how recruitment strategies can diversify the teacher workforce, examine how recruitment strategies can diversify the teacher workforce through strategies such as incentives specifically for teacher candidates of color, and adopting culturally relevant practices. TWG members also noted that as districts seek to diversify their talent pipelines, they will also be looking to novel sources of talent, including community-based organizations, tutors, paraprofessionals, business apprenticeships, and parents. Other strategies that states are exploring – and that could benefit from research - include teacher license reciprocity agreements and their link to expanding pools of teacher candidates from which to recruit. Research is also needed to assess if licensure advancement and “teacher leadership” are approaches for retaining excellent educators. TWG members noted that qualitative research is needed to understand what teacher

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

cultural competency means and strategies to increase it. Finally, research is needed on how states can obtain and leverage sustainable funding streams to recruit and retain a diverse teaching workforce.

Providing Access to Student and Educator Mental Health Supports

TWG members observed that COVID-19 has been stressful for students, parents, and educators. Remote learning appears to prevent many students from connections with peers and teachers that support emotional and behavioral health and to increase the vulnerability of students with high-risk home environments. At the same time, remote learning decreases access to school-based mental health services. Research and research syntheses are needed to guide policymakers on what works best in allocating resources to meet students' and educators' mental health needs. There are many unanswered research questions as to the prevalence, costs, and roles of counselors, social workers, and other mental health professionals in schools. And, even before the pandemic, there was a shortage of mental health professionals in schools. State education agencies need accurate information about mental health indicators, including rates of suicide, suicide attempts, and mental health emergency room visits for elementary and secondary learners. Research is also needed to guide school systems on how to connect with community resources and improve systems of support beyond the school. As education researchers begin to address this set of questions, the TWG recommends that the research community engage with mental health care providers and training organizations for input.

Engaging and Re-Engaging Students

Socio-emotional learning and engagement were also mentioned as key issues, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. TWG members pointed out that estimates show a quarter to a half of students were not participating in online education when schooling was fully remote. These – and other – students may not have been emotionally or intellectually present even when they were in classrooms pre-COVID-19. Researchers have identified chronic absenteeism as a major problem in many schools and it is associated with disparities in outcomes. A key policy question for many LEAs and SEAs is how to re-engage these 'missing' students. Researchers can help education leaders understand what evidence-based interventions are available to re-engage students. Education policy leaders and researchers can draw on lessons from the learning sciences in developing policies and systems to engage students and create meaningful learning experiences. TWG members suggested using project-based and inquiry-based learning and performance assessments

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

that connect students to the real world to re-engage learners in school. Participants also noted that as educators and researchers seek to re-engage students, they should focus on acceleration of learning, not just remediation, as schools, districts and states address pandemic learning loss. Finally, the TWG also noted that research is needed on parent engagement in their children's schooling.

Preparing K-12 Students for Careers

The TWG members noted that K-12 education systems often do not consider future employment as a central component of course sequence planning. However, as middle-class jobs are disappearing, and economic divides are widening, SEAs and LEAs are increasingly designing curricula and programs with possible future career pathways in mind. Research is needed to inform what career-aligned experiences should be offered to students, and how those experiences should be offered. TWG members suggested that barriers of racial bias, trouble "belonging" in certain careers, and limited capacity to pursue opportunities need to be considered as schools and school systems implement career advising strategies. Given a rapidly changing economy, schools need evidence to guide their development of course sequencing and instruction to prepare students who are innovative and entrepreneurial, and who have adequate problem-solving and socioemotional skills. Education systems also need information about how to implement flexible career pathways that give students options as well as the skills they need to move in and out of jobs in a rapidly changing market. TWG members agreed that researchers, policymakers, and educators should engage and collaborate more frequently with employers, who benefit from high quality education systems. For example, one research need identified by employers is information on how to recruit from an increasingly diverse population of employees and how to facilitate collaborative employee interactions across diverse groups. Research could contribute to understanding how best to support local communities of practice that include schools, businesses, intermediaries, and community-based organizations with the shared goal of preparing students for careers.

Modernizing Assessments

TWG members agreed that education systems should be modernized to assess and address students' basic skills and learning needs quickly, such as with interim or formative assessments. Research is needed to understand how to use assessment for both accountability purposes as well as to support diagnosis and student progress monitoring, thus helping teachers to address students' needs and accelerating their learning. Researchers and state agencies should provide schools with

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

guidance about authentic learning assessment strategies. More research is needed to guide educators on authentic and performance-based assessments.

Improving Data-Driven Decision-Making in Schools

Relatedly, the researchers on the TWG discussed the need to improve the use of education data systems – and the need for better evidence to guide data use in SEAs, LEAs, and schools. Policy leaders on the TWG affirmed the importance of data collection, capacity, and use as policy issues. Diverse organizations and agencies (K-12 schools, postsecondary, business, community-based organizations) have different data, priorities, and policy levers. The education sciences could provide guidance on how to align these education data systems by identifying a set of core variables and metrics that each system should collect, collecting data systematically, and building data sharing platforms and data agreements. This information could help multiple community stakeholders to understand and improve education. Timely data drive continuous improvement in the business sector and such a model could be leveraged to improve education outcomes. Education leaders want quantitative data on trends to measure progress and qualitative data on context to inform them in making decisions.

In many cases, policymakers do not necessarily need more data but more capacity to analyze and use the data they have. TWG members noted that education leadership training does not always include data use, but it should. In addition, participants recommended that NCER offer trainings, or SEAs with appropriate staff expertise could train LEA staff. TWG members also noted that training is needed on how to improve data that is collected and used to address questions of equity, not only in disaggregation of findings but across the entire research process – research questions, measures used, and their meaning. One suggestion raised by participants was that researchers could examine how education leaders can connect fiscal data and student performance data to improve equity and outcomes. TWG members also felt that teacher preparation and professional development should include training on data use and the use of data to improve equity.

Examining Education Finance

TWG members discussed that one form of potentially useful data is related to education finance. Unfortunately, education systems often lack individuals with the skills, abilities, and resources to carefully examine questions about education finance. The policymakers recommended that researchers study how best to use new funding for schools, such as that from the American Rescue

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

Plan, and the implications of COVID-19 for enrollment and learning remediation. Since most education expenses are for labor (for example, teachers, tutors, reading aides, counselors), researchers and education leaders need to examine ways to use money and fiscal resources to harness human capacity differently and consider how financial decisions affect change. All research should consider the impact of resources on outcomes (return on investment). Much research in the economics of education has been conducted about funding equity, but results are rarely applied to changing the system. Researchers could also examine influences on funding decisions. Can the research community generate high-quality evidence as to how money – and allocation of funds – matter for higher need students? Participants noted that researchers need to focus more on how to identify and serve students below the federal poverty level – those living in communities of deep poverty – and recommended moving beyond the use of free and reduced-price lunch as a broad indicator of poverty. A key question for which additional evidence is needed is how much funding is needed to provide the breadth of services required to support learning in the poorest schools. Previous research indicates a need for wraparound services, including access to housing and food, and one estimate indicates that an annual investment of about \$30,000 per student in these environments of deep poverty is necessary. This is just one example of the types of research that could be carried out to help us generate high-quality information about how school systems could leverage financial resources to help the most underserved learners and communities.

Creating Adaptive Education Systems

TWG members agreed that COVID-19 has shown that education systems must better prepare for emergencies, and they worried that the pandemic will have a lasting effect on student achievement and attainment. Education systems need to be flexible and adaptive to rapid change so that they are not crippled by it. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided the education and research community with an opportunity to learn from what went well, what did not, and to propose strategies to put in place to ensure rapid responses to future emergencies and moments of crisis. For example, early identification and intervention are key in helping the most vulnerable students not fall behind. In general, education systems have been too slow to evolve and do not provide adequate incentives to encourage widespread adoption of effective practices. Participants recommended learning from the medical field that has an organized system of knowledge-building that adapts to new discoveries and has real consequences and accountability for not using evidence-based practices. TWG members felt that similar systems are needed in education.

How Can NCER Better Support Research on Top Education Systems/Policy Issues?

In the next part of the meeting, NCER staff asked for recommendations on improving its engagement with education systems and policy work. This discussion pivoted away from the specific issues raised earlier and toward how IES can better support research and dissemination in education systems and policy more broadly. TWG member recommendations are organized according to five themes.

Support a Systems Approach to Systems and Policy Research

Although it seems – from the overlapping pre-work and the high level of engagement in the day’s discussion – that TWG members agreed on many of the most pressing education policy issues, it was noted that policy leaders generally think about them as broad, macro-level questions. A TWG member pointed out that NCER is generally perceived as supporting research on specific interventions rather than systems change, and this may be why researchers haven’t often sought NCER funding for work at the systems level. It is difficult to answer broad policy questions solely with experimental methods, though rapid cycle evaluations could fill a need. NCER should encourage researchers to untangle and understand broader, dynamic education systems and processes, and to develop methods that capture and account for changing contexts. The TWG encouraged an interdisciplinary approach with different stakeholder perspectives, methods, and measures to move the field forward.

Encourage Partnerships with Key Stakeholders

Research results that respond to practitioners’ needs are especially important during times of crisis. TWG members felt that the relevance of research proposals could be increased with more collaboration between researchers and education leaders. They agreed that NCER should encourage researchers to identify and engage policymaker and practitioner stakeholders, learn their perspectives and priorities, assess their needs and understand their values, seek their input on research questions, collaborate throughout the research planning and implementation cycle, and report findings that address stakeholder needs. TWG members felt that buy-in from practitioners and policymakers could increase the chances that they are invested in learning from and applying research findings. Evidence of local effectiveness can motivate leaders to change their practices and justify the changes. TWG members identified research-practice partnerships as one strategy for increasing the local relevance of research and its applicability to specific local questions.

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

Support Rapid Research to Practice Efforts

TWG members agreed that education policy research results should be disseminated to the field quickly. Audience and timing are important. Policymakers are looking for evidence to support their decisions and quantitative data to track trends. When discussing how different funders of education research seek to disseminate policy research findings, TWG participants suggested that IES consider funding models that support policymakers' need to act on research recommendations for urgent problems of practice (e.g., rapid response grants). However, because IES cannot be as nimble as foundations in making funding decisions, NCER should consider calling for policy and systems research that is deep and deliberate rather than studies that require a rapid turnaround time. That is, other funding sources may be more appropriate in cases where policymakers need to act on research recommendations as soon as possible (i.e., rapid response grants). Rapid cycle evaluation methods, such as plan-do-study-act continuous quality improvement approaches can help to inform policy solutions, and NCER funding may be appropriate for continuous improvement methods that are applied within a longer-term research project.

Disseminate Information that is Useful to Policymakers

- *Dissemination of Findings with Information and Formats Tailored for Policymakers.* TWG members agreed that NCER should continue to require researchers to produce and disseminate information resources tailored for stakeholder audiences, including practitioners, policymakers, and the communities in which they are working. Results should be relevant and presented in easy to access and read formats and tailored for specific stakeholder audiences. TWG members suggested that grantees could work with intermediary organizations to help education leaders understand research findings are relevant to policy and practice. TWG members also identified other areas where research is needed, including a need for comparative effectiveness research that supports educators' decisions regarding which products, curricula, and programs to use. The TWG noted that educators want research evidence regarding whether commercial products work, under which circumstances, and for whom. Researchers must consider, address, and clearly communicate the associated efforts, risks, and costs to SEAs and LEAs of various products and interventions. School leaders need to be able to assess which intervention is the best choice given their budget, staffing, and other resources. They also need support for making informed decisions when an ideal intervention is not possible.

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

- *Generating and Sharing Knowledge About Implementation.* TWG members agreed that research must be actionable; and results must be presented in a manner that makes recommendations for action clear to practitioners and policymakers. Reports of research findings should inform practitioners of issues to consider when implementing interventions. Educators need to know both what to do and how to do it. Researchers should provide information about how to effectively implement and scale evidence-based interventions. NCER should support research on what is needed for practitioners to translate research to practice, to support decision making, and to address barriers to implementation. Case studies can show how to implement evidence-based strategies in their state or district context. Decisions to implement recommended practices often depend on how much practitioners trust the information source. Research-practice partnerships and intermediary partners can support development of implementation guidance. Researchers can test which strategies and incentives work for educators to use evidence-based strategies.
- *Research Syntheses.* TWG members recommend that IES consider going beyond the practice guides generated by the What Works Clearinghouse and instead creating a body of knowledge connecting studies, that is generating research syntheses. Education leaders use research syntheses, as they do not have time or training to comb through the results of individual studies.

Attend to Equity in Grantmaking and Research Focus

TWG members returned to concerns about equity in their recommendations for NCER grantmaking, specifically regarding broadening participation in the research process. This could include support of interdisciplinary research, inclusion of non-researchers, and support of researchers who are new to IES grant funding. The TWG provided several suggestions about ways and strategies that NCER could use as they provide technical assistance. NCER could provide more structured technical assistance to ensure applicants new to IES funding develop competitive research proposals. NCER could also provide technical assistance on methodology for applicants with relevant research questions but less competitive proposed methods. Some potential grant applicants with research questions relevant to equity may not be academic researchers and may require grant-writing technical assistance to prepare competitive applications. Participants also noted that it is likely that such applicants have research interests focused on issues of educational equity and may not realize that IES funds such work. NCER may need to conduct active outreach to encourage experts most likely to address equity research questions to apply for NCER research funding. TWG members also

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

pointed out that interdisciplinary research teams could help unearth embedded inequities in data collection, measures, and models.

Encourage and Provide Resources and Incentives for Policy-Relevant Research

In addition to the ideas discussed above, TWG members suggested a number of specific ideas for how NCER could support research that leads to policy and systems improvement:

- NCER should consider restructuring funding opportunities to prioritize policymakers' needs above researchers' interests or preferences. NCER should invite multiple stakeholders, including intermediaries, to provide input on its research agenda as well as its application and review process. One suggestion raised by TWG members was for NCER to begin its reviews with policymakers assessing the relevance of proposed research prior to researchers assessing the scientific merit of the application.
- NCER should define a clear path from basic research to use of research findings in the field. NCER should support and incentivize research aimed at changing education practice and to encourage dissemination beyond publication in peer-reviewed journals.
- NCER should make clear that it supports the application of rigorous qualitative methods and mixed methods research in order to study values and priorities of stakeholders including students, communities, educators, and policymakers.
- NCER should develop a theory of action for research projects that explicitly requires that LEAs, SEAs, intermediaries, and the private sector be included throughout the research process, as appropriate.
- NCER should ensure grantees have developed authentic partnerships with stakeholders. NCER should also give SEAs/LEAs more incentive and resources to initiate research rather than just write letters of support. NCER could convene conferences or work sessions to facilitate building trust between practitioners and researchers.
- IES should offer a "How it Works" Clearinghouse that identifies which interventions work, how they work, the contexts in which they work, whom they work for, and how to implement effective interventions. Information should be included about modifications that may be necessary to ensure an intervention meets students' needs. It would be useful to pilot test evidence-based practices in multiple contexts, share lessons learned, develop strategies for implementation, and produce and disseminate implementation playbooks.
- NCER should help education agencies learn how to use data and support them in sharing lessons learned. NCER could also support research on how to best communicate and share data

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

with parents and teachers, such as engaging third parties to create data visualizations to communicate information. Partnerships with researchers can help them understand and use the data these agencies already collect, as well as improve data collection and usability. Building capacity for data usage is essential to making any research accessible to practitioners.

- NCER should also engage education product developers and publishers, who should participate in studies about their products.
- NCER should support interdisciplinary and mixed methods research and applying innovative methods, such as GIS mapping and social network analysis, to examine how systems beyond education affect student outcomes.
- TWG members suggested that NCER could focus on one priority grant program area, such as distance learning, to explore innovations in research funding.

Concluding Recommendations

The TWG emphasized inequity as the most pressing systems-level problem to be solved across the board in education. All education policy research needs to explicitly address inequities, carefully examine contexts and power structures, and unpack group differences (which should not be considered group deficits). A long-term commitment to continuous improvement research with frequent measures of progress is needed to address inequity. This will require collaboration with partners and providing guidance and incentives for systems change. TWG members agreed that, if NCER wants practitioners to change practice in response to research findings, it must incentivize researchers to focus on the needs of those implementing policies and interventions and to produce timely, relevant, and concise actionable information, with points for consideration regarding contexts, costs, risks, and benefits.

Throughout the day, IES NCER staff were able to hear the top priority issues, concerns, and ideas of the invited education policy leaders and researchers in the TWG. NCER appreciates the generous contribution of TWG members' time and their attention to improving education policy and systems research in NCER.



Virtual Meeting Agenda

Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research IES NCER Technical Working Group December 7, 2020

10:00 – 10:15 Welcome, Introduction of IES Staff, and Overview of the day

- Welcome (Mark Schneider, IES Director)
- Welcome (Elizabeth Albro, NCER Commissioner)
- Introduction to TWG meeting, Overview & Logistics (Corinne Alfeld, NCER Program Officer)

10:15 – 11:30 Full group meeting

Education policy leaders:

Introduce yourself and, from your vantage point as a leader in the education policy space, identify in rank order the most pressing issues facing SEAs, LEAs, and their schools. How are SEAs and LEAs currently addressing these issues? What information do they need? What are the most useful ways to provide research findings to education leaders?

- Each education policy leader has 8 minutes to speak (up to 56 min. total)
- Discussion: Questions, reactions, comments, points of commonality (20 min.)

11:30 – 11:40 Break

11:40 – 12:55 Full group meeting

Education Researchers:

Introduce yourself and, from your vantage point as an education researcher, identify in rank order the most pressing issues facing the SEAs and LEAs with whom you have worked. What research findings are available to education leaders to help them address these issues? What additional research is necessary to inform decision-making by education leaders about these issues? What are the most useful ways to share research findings with education leaders?

- Each education researcher has 8 minutes to speak (up to 56 min. total)
- Discussion: Questions, reactions, comments, points of commonality (20 min.)

12:55– 1:25 Lunch Break (30 min)

1:25 – 2:00 Full group meeting

- Summary of pre-work
- Commonalities and differences between each group's answers and why
- Open discussion, including any other issues not discussed in the morning
- Need to confirm 3 key issues prior to breaking into subgroups to discuss

2:00 – 2:10 Break and convene in subgroups (3 separate Teams meetings)

2:10 – 3:00 Subgroup meetings (TWG participants only, via separate Teams invitations)

- Three subgroups of policymakers and researchers formed by common interests in specific policies (identified by prework and morning discussion).
- Each group:
 - Identifies 2-5 top research questions (RQs) to which leaders need answers for the issue
 - Suggests how education research can generate relevant evidence for decision-makers

Technical Working Group on Improving K-12 Education Systems and Policy Research

- Recommends practical ways that education researchers can disseminate their results to ensure that they are used in education policy decisions

3:00 – 3:10 Break and transition back to full group

3:10 – 3:30 Full group meeting

Report out on top RQs and dissemination strategies from each of 3 subgroups (6-7 min. each)

3:30 – 4:20 Full group meeting

- Discussion: How can IES better support research on top education systems/policy issues?
 - IES Grants (25 min.): What features of a research grant program would best address the policy questions identified? (e.g., types of data, partners, methodological approaches)
 - IES Researchers (25 min.):
 - How can IES increase the range of applicants' methodological and content expertise? (e.g., other disciplines, mixed methods)
 - How can IES increase the diversity of applicants? (i.e., institutions and PIs)

4:20 - 4:30 Break and Individual Reflection

- Participants review the day on their own during the break and identify the key policy issue they would suggest that IES prioritize, what information researchers would need to provide to support decisions on this issue, and how IES can best support this type of research.

4:30 – 5:15 Full group meeting

- Participants each briefly present their top issue, the research necessary to support decision making on it, and how IES can best support this type of research (3 min. per participant).

5:15 – 5:25 Wrap Up/Next Steps/Thanks (Liz Albro)

5:25 – 5:30 Final contractor Instructions – complete all forms

5:30 Adjourn