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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee: My name is Jim Kemple. I serve as the founding Executive Director of the Research Alliance for New York City Schools at New York University. Our organization is a nonpartisan research center that conducts rigorous studies on topics that matter to the policymakers, educators and other stakeholders who work with New York City's public schools. We strive to advance equity and excellence in education by providing evidence about policies and practices that promote student success. Prior to my current position, I worked for 18 years at MDRC, overseeing scientific evaluations of education, welfare-to-work, and employment and training initiatives across the country. Before that, I served as director for the Higher Achievement Program here in DC, and I taught high school math.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I can think of few more important roles for the federal government to play in education than its support for building and communicating rigorous evidence about what works to improve teaching and learning across the country. The current economic and fiscal environment makes it more important than ever to use scientific evidence to inform difficult decisions about how to allocate scarce resources, and to invest in building more and better evidence about the efforts we make to strengthen our schools, particularly efforts that flow from the federal government.

From my perspective as an educator and researcher for more than 30 years, the Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) have produced incredibly important changes. Until ESRA and the creation of IES, education research was allowed to function at standards that would never pass muster with public health, employment and training, or welfare policy, let alone with medicine or agriculture. As a nation, we have paid a heavy price. The paucity of good evidence in education, and the inability to effectively communicate lessons from the little scientific evidence that did exist, left us with a legacy of reinventing the wheel and chasing fads rather than building a reliable and useful track record of what worked, what did not work, for whom and under what circumstances. While I believe we are much better off now than we were 12 years ago, we are still saddled by that legacy.

Since its inception, IES has funded and released findings from 90 studies that meet the widely agreed-upon "gold standard" for research, the randomized controlled trial. That's 89 more such studies than all of IES's predecessors combined. However, I believe IES's influence extends well beyond the specific research studies and activities is has supported. It has changed the way federal, state, and local policymakers evaluate and use education research.

In New York City, where I lead a research partnership with the city schools, the Mayor, the Schools Chancellor, and most senior staff in the Department of Education now ask pointed questions about whether the research that is presented to them meets scientific standards. When they see high-quality research, they are much more inclined to use the resulting evidence in their decision-making. For example, New York City discontinued its use of financial incentives for school performance in the face of solid evidence that these incentives did not improve student achievement. By the same token, the City has reinforced its commitment to creating and sustaining small schools of choice, citing scientific evidence that these schools are significantly improving graduation and college readiness rates, particularly among some of the city's most vulnerable students.

IES has also helped develop a new generation of researchers and research organizations that are equipped to meet those high standards of evidence. More than 25 universities are now attracting the nation's best and brightest to training programs in rigorous education science. While these young people come from multiple disciplines, they are committed to conducting high-quality education research that will be useful to policymakers and practitioners.

In my view, these transformations have moved education research much closer to the caliber of research conducted for decades through the U.S. Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services and the NIH.

While applauding these important accomplishments, I would also describe IES as a work in progress. There are several areas where the Institute could be improved. First, in some cases, I believe IES has promoted scientific rigor at the expense of policy and practical relevance. Second, IES has under-invested in building partnerships and lines of communication between researchers and the policymakers and educators who should inform and benefit from its work. Third, I think IES can do more to make its work accessible. My sense is that the original framework established by ESRA allows for advancements in these areas. The key challenge lies in helping the current leadership of IES continue to make strides in each of these directions.

I would like to organize my remarks around four core principles that I believe should guide the further strengthening of IES. I'll call these the four Ps: Preserve scientific rigor; Prioritize relevance for policy and practice; Promote greater use of high quality research; and Prepare for the future. Each of these principles should be seen as reinforcing and complimenting the others.

P1: Preserve the commitment to scientific rigor. Specifically, IES should continue to place a premium on funding research that establishes strong causal connections between specific education policies and practices and student outcomes we care about: most notably, achievement in literacy, math, and the sciences; social development; and college and career readiness.

Prior to ESRA and IES, the federal investment in education research generated reasonably good evidence about the nature of the problems we face in our schools, but yielded weak and unsubstantiated claims about how various approaches may or may not have solved

those problems and improved teaching and learning. Even after only 12 years of work under IES, the education research community is finding that many of those claims, both positive and negative, turned out to be plain wrong.

For example, over the past 12 years the federal government allocated hundreds of millions of dollars for academic enhancements to after-school programs, innovative teacher professional development programs, cutting-edge adolescent literacy programs, and computer-based tutoring tools. Many of these investments were guided by compelling theory but, due to the legacy of low quality research in education, the evidence base for their actual effectiveness was weak. Fortunately, Congress and the U.S. Department of Education had the foresight to make sure that these new investments were accompanied by rigorous evaluations under IES to learn about their impact on teaching and learning. Unfortunately, it turned out that most these initiatives, on average, had little or no impact.

In a more encouraging example, many federal, state and local policymakers are currently working to expand pre-kindergarten programs. Due in part to the growing commitment to scientific rigor in education research, these policymakers no longer have to rely on one single study from the 1960s involving less than 120 toddlers who were exposed to an incredibly expensive set of services and supports before they entered school. Evidence from a growing number of credible studies is showing the benefits of affordable early intervention.

Federal support for these kinds of rigorous impact studies is crucial to developing a more effective educational system.

P2: Prioritize rigorous education research that is more relevant to policymakers and practitioners. This challenge has two parts: 1) supporting partnerships and collaboration between researchers, policymakers and practitioners, and 2) ensuring that studies address questions about how and why education practices and policies work or do not work.

Prioritizing Partnerships: My organization in New York City, and similar groups in more than a dozen other cities around the country, are beginning to demonstrate the value of partnerships that include researchers, policymakers, administrators, and educators. By working together to set research priorities, interpret results and put findings to use, we are accelerating the pace at which research can inform policy and practice.

For instance, we have worked with the New York City Department of Education to enhance the largest school survey in the nation, which collects vital information from students, parents and teachers; we have produced individual reports for schools involved in our studies, to help them improve in real time; and we have examined the effects of the City's high school choice process on low-achieving students, producing insights that have been useful to both the district and local community groups that are helping students navigate the system. This is a far cry from the typical end product of research, which generally targets academic colleagues and so often sits on our shelves collecting dust. From my perspective, IES is making strides toward promoting this kind of collaboration and should continue to do so.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education in general, and IES in particular, should continue to encourage links between federal programmatic funding and IES-directed studies that build solid evidence about the impact of these investments. While IES's independence should remain paramount, I believe a great deal of its struggle to be relevant can be traced to the limited role that other offices in the Department of Education (as well as the Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor) have had in prioritizing the research questions it pursues and to the limited role that IES has played in getting buy-in from those offices.

Until recently, IES has had even less interaction with State and Local Education Authorities, who in the end are the ultimate consumers of the evidence IES produces. This is beginning to change, with new initiatives like IES's Research-Practice Partnership program and the requirement that the Regional Education Laboratories (RELs) conduct their work through what are called "research alliances," which are formal advisory groups comprised of state and local education policymakers and practitioners. I would encourage the continuation and expansion of these efforts.

Prioritizing How and Why Questions: In my view, IES's pursuit of scientific rigor has sometimes narrowed the scope of research to focus exclusively on the question "did it work or not?" This obscures the kind of information we desperately need to make education better. Specifically, I would encourage IES to expand its pursuit of questions about how, why, for whom and under what circumstances things work or do not work. These questions should be essential to rigorous evaluations of program effectiveness and, in my opinion, will be especially valuable when we find something that did not work.

For example, I helped conduct a study of what are called High School Career Academies, a promising school reform initiative that is supposed to prevent students from dropping out and help them enter the workforce after high school. On average, we found that the programs had no effect on dropout rates (although it had large positive effects on workforce outcomes). However, when we dug a little deeper and looked at students who were at the highest risk of dropping out and were enrolled in the most dysfunctional schools, we found quite large dropout reductions. This was in spite of the fact that the programs in these schools were not very strong; they were just much better than anything else available to those students. We were able to attribute these effects to the program's emphasis on personal relationships and high expectations, particularly in the context of an otherwise chaotic environment. We would not have learned this without expanding the prevue of our research beyond the thumbs up or thumbs down question of "did it work or not." As a result, that study is listed in the What Works Clearinghouse – IES's definitive resource on scientifically validated research in education – as one of only seven with evidence of positive effects on keeping students in high school.

Questions about how and why policies and practices work or do not work are important both in the context of new initiatives and when proven practices are being adapted to new circumstances. In particular, IES should continue its recent investments in what is called "continuous improvement research" – a process by which data collection and analysis are integrated into program development and implementation. While still in its infancy, this seems like a promising method for using rigorous research to help schools become more effective over time.

P3: Promote wider use and application of education research. Again, I believe this is a dual challenge: 1) treating dissemination as a continuous process rather than a single event at the end of a study, and 2) making smarter use of technology to organize and provide access to high-quality evidence.

Promoting Dissemination as a Continuous Process: In my experience, this also ties back to the importance of building relationships between researchers and the audiences we are trying to reach. For example, the Career Academies study I mentioned earlier was a 15-year evaluation (yes, 15 years). This work, involving literally hundreds of contributors and collaborators, has had a profound influence on career and technical education. While the study found that the Career Academies produced sustained positive effects for on long term workforce outcomes for young people, the story of the study's influence began before we collected a single piece of data. My colleagues and I at MDRC started this project by asking both leaders in the field and teachers and administrators in schools what they thought would be worth learning about innovative approaches to the school-to-work transition. We continued this dialog at each step in the study providing a wide range of audiences with early and long-term findings and asking for their guidance about how our work could be more useful. As a result, key stakeholders bought into the research process from its inception; they were able to confront the results, even though not all of them were positive; and, most importantly, they continue to this day to work diligently to reform and strengthen their programs to be better aligned with what we found made a difference.

Prioritizing Smarter Use of Technology: IES has led the effort to bring dissemination of high-quality education research into the late 20th Century (although probably not the 21st Century) through its creation of the What Works Clearinghouse – a compendium of studies that have been screened for scientific merit and catalogued by topic. It has also supported related resources like the Better Evidence Encyclopedia and the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness. More recently, IES has issued a call for the establishment of a Center on Knowledge Utilization, whose mission will be to study how educators and policymakers use research. I believe these are investments worth sustaining and increasing, particularly if they continue their development of research-based practice guides in addition to their mandate to serve as arbiters of what constitutes scientifically valid evidence.

However, to advance the use of rigorous research, I think IES will need to make smarter use of technology to make this work more accessible and user-friendly. I do not think this is a matter of keeping better track of how many reports get published or how many website visits they receive. This is beyond my area of expertise, but I am struck by the ease with which I can find pretty useful and generally reliable information about restaurant and movie reviews, and ratings of cars and appliances. I am hard pressed to believe that those of us who care about making high-quality research more widely available do not have something to learn from these efforts.

P4: Prepare a next generation of education researchers who are committed to scientific rigor, to relevance for policy and practice, and to applying what they learn in the field. This may be the most important legacy of ESRA and IES.

Hundreds of talented young people have completed or are enrolled in training programs supported by IES that place a special emphasis on teaching about scientific research methods. I have had the privilege of working directly with nearly a dozen of these young scholars, including six who are now students at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development. I have been impressed by their competence, certainly, but mostly by their passion for making a difference in schools. None of these folks will see themselves as being successful if their primary accomplishments are to accumulate a long list of articles in prestigious journals and receive tenure at a prominent university. While many of them are certainly destined for these accomplishments, I am convinced that they will make their biggest impact in producing high-quality work that education policymakers and practitioners value and use.

From that perspective, I believe IES's support for pre- and post-doctoral training programs and for its methodological and professional development activities are critical investments. I particularly applaud IES's recent call for universities to form partnerships with schools and school districts as key components of their doctoral training programs and to ensure the graduate students spend time working closely with administrators and teachers to learn about their needs and interests.

In closing, I think we must recognize that despite the great leap forward precipitated by ESRA and IES, the reality is that most states and school districts still use rigorous research in policy and administrative decisions much too infrequently. This is, in part, about the role that ideology and politics play (both constructively and disruptively), but it is also because the policy and practitioner communities not been very involved in the production of evidence and setting of research priorities. There is still very limited evidence on issues that matter to them; the evidence that does exist is often hard to understand and apply; and there is little incentive for them to produce or use rigorous evidence. The recommendations I am offering here would go a long way toward addressing these issues and would help make schools and school districts more active partners in education research.

Of course, there are more than 14,000 jurisdictions that make policy and administer K-12 education in the US. The role of the federal government is limited at best (with only 7 percent of education expenditures covered by federal funding and limited capacity to manage implementation). It seems imperative that a not-insignificant portion of this limited federal investment be accompanied by two requirements—similar to those we've seen in the Investing in Innovation Fund: 1) that SEAs and LEAs use federal resources to support initiatives that have credible evidence of their effectiveness, and 2) when such evidence is lacking, that they be willing to participate in rigorous research that will help fill this gap. Together with the four Ps I have proposed, over time, this approach could help our nation build a firmer foundation of evidence and ultimately produce better outcomes for our students and teachers.