



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SCIENCES

THE DIRECTOR

November 5, 2008

Dr. Robert Granger
Chairperson
National Board for Education Sciences

Dear Bob,

I appreciate the opportunity to respond on behalf of IES to the Final Report to the NBES of the Blue Ribbon Expert Panel on the What Works Clearinghouse.

First, let me express my appreciation to the NBES and you for your interest in taking up so quickly the question raised by the language in 2009 Senate appropriations committee report about the WWC. Likewise, I am very appreciative of the work of the members of the panel. They are leaders in the field of systematic reviews of evidence of effectiveness -- "blue ribbon" in every sense of the word. I've served on or been involved with quite a few expert panels. It is always difficult to get busy scholars down to work and even more difficult to generate consensus among individuals whose views are informed by their own research on the topic at hand. This panel's work is, in my experience, a positive far outlier in terms of speed and quality.

The Senate committee called for, "a focused study addressing the fundamental question of whether the Clearinghouse's evidence review process and reports are scientifically valid, that is, provide accurate information about the strength of evidence of meaningful effects on important educational outcomes."

The committee raised a critical question because the WWC is the linchpin for the entire enterprise of evidence-based decisions in education. Education practitioners and policymakers want to know what works. In a marketplace that is unsophisticated with regard to research quality there has to be an entity that uses rigorous scientific standards to vet research on education program effectiveness for practitioners and policymakers. Further, that entity has to become the preeminent source for such information, effectively muting the cacophony of conflicting claims and assertions that arise from those who advocate with numbers or draw conclusions based on methods that cannot support causal conclusions.

In that context, I am gratified that the Blue Ribbon Panel concluded that:

- (1) WWC procedures and processes for identifying and extracting information from intervention studies are generally well documented and follow reasonable standards and practices for systematic reviews;
- (2) WWC Intervention and Topic Area Reports provide succinct and meaningful summaries of the evidence on the effectiveness of specific education interventions.

The Blue Ribbon Panel has made a number of thoughtful and informed recommendations for improvement of the WWC. The WWC must continue to evolve, along with the research on which it draws. IES welcomes the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel and will move forward to establish a regular review process to ensure that WWC not only continues to use reasonable standards for conducting and reporting systematic reviews, but also is able to establish new standards that are informed by the best thinking the field.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grover Whitehurst', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Grover (Russ) Whitehurst, Ph.D.
Director
Institute of Education Sciences