

U.S. Department of Education

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“Fostering Innovation in Education”

Testimony

Good morning, Senator Hagan. Thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee and discuss the ways in which the U.S. Department of Education is committed to fostering innovation in education. And thank you for your support for education, both here in North Carolina and nationally.

Background

It’s no secret that, to keep up with the demands of a global economy, every student must graduate from high school with college- and career-ready skills. But the reality is that 3 in every 10 students fail to complete high school on time and, of those who do, only two-thirds enroll in a college or university. Completion rates for those who seek a post-secondary degree or certification do not keep pace with enrollment. The statistics for minority students, low-income students, and English learners are dramatically worse.

What many of our schools need to ensure that every student achieves success is transformational change, not simply tinkering around the edges. Previous federal efforts to improve our education system have largely been incremental and yielded results that were less than adequate.

Today, however, we have a tremendous opportunity to re-envision and renew what public education looks like, and three factors have set the stage. First, President Obama is committed to the ambitious but attainable goal of ensuring that America will regain its lost ground and have the highest proportion of students graduating from college in the world by 2020. Second, thanks to leadership from President Obama and Congress, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act) provided nearly \$100 billion to support education,

including a \$5 billion investment for Race to the Top and the Investing in Innovation Fund, the largest one-time Federal investment in education in history. These funds invest heavily in education both as a way to provide jobs now and to lay the foundation for long-term prosperity. Our nation's economic competitiveness and the path to the American Dream depend on providing every child with an education that will enable them to succeed in a global economy that is predicated on knowledge and innovation. And, finally, Congress is working to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which we hope will not only fix the problems of the No Child Left Behind Act, but also establish a re-envisioned Federal role in education.

To take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity, we must identify, support, and evaluate new educational models – models that focus on improving outcomes for students, teachers, and principals. And we must acknowledge that most of the best ideas, policies, and practices are locally grown. That is why the Department of Education is committed to investing in evidence-based innovative practices to enhance these programs and bring them to scale.

Investing in Innovation

One program designed to do just that is the Investing in Innovation program, or i3. i3 provides for \$650 million in competitive grants to school districts and nonprofit organizations to expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative practices in the following four areas:

1. Supporting effective teachers and principals;
2. Improving the use of data to accelerate student achievement;
3. Complementing the implementation of standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and careers; and
4. Turning around persistently low-performing schools.

Grantees will also be required to form partnerships with the private sector to obtain matching funds. Applicants will be required to propose projects that develop or expand innovations in critical areas of education reform that will benefit high-need and other students. We are requiring that practices supported by an i3 grant have a demonstrated effect on:

1. Improving student achievement or student academic growth;
2. Closing achievement gaps;
3. Decreasing dropout rates;
4. Increasing high school graduation rates; or
5. Increasing college enrollment and completion rates.

Through i3, we are introducing a new rigorous, three-tiered evidence framework that will direct different levels of funding to programs at three different stages of development, with the highest level of funding going to programs with the strongest evidence:

1. Development grants will require a reasonable hypothesis that the practice or strategy will result in significantly improved outcomes. The purpose of these grants will be to develop fresh ideas;
2. Validation grants will require moderate evidence of effectiveness. These grants will be aimed at validating and spreading promising programs to a regional scale; and
3. Scale Up grants will require strong evidence and will be aimed at bringing proven programs to national scale.

In an effort to support what works, the i3 program also contains a robust evaluation component. We will require grantees to conduct an independent program evaluation and we will broadly share the results of any evaluations of i3 funded- efforts. Grantees must also participate in a "community of practice" to share, document, and disseminate to the field best practices and lessons learned.

On March 12, the Department released the notice inviting i3 applications. Since then, more than 2400 letters of intent to apply have been submitted to the Department and approximately 4000 people have participated in the three pre-application workshops and webinars. Interest in the i3 grant program has been tremendous, and is indicative of the enthusiasm that exists around the country to innovate and to scale up effective, local strategies.

To help i3 applicants and to serve the larger purpose of creating an innovation community, the Department of Education has launched an online community, called the Open Innovation Portal. Though not a formal part of the i3 grant process, the portal is the first national forum that connects entrepreneurs, education stakeholders of all types, and funders for the purpose of partnering and developing and funding innovative ideas in the education sector. Through this portal, the Department hopes to provide a forum for like-minded individuals, who may choose to work in partnership, to accelerate the development, identification, and broad use of innovative products, practices, and processes to improve education in schools.

Innovation in ESEA

The reauthorization of the ESEA provides an opportunity to continue the i3 program. Our reauthorization proposal would build on the current i3 program, and provide additional competitive grants to expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative and evidence-based practices, programs, and strategies that significantly improve student

outcomes. The Secretary would continue to use a rigorous three-tiered evidence framework that directs the highest levels of funding to programs with the strongest evidence.

The Secretary could also give preference to applications that propose to develop or expand innovations in specific pressing needs, such as improving the teaching and learning of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects, improving early-learning outcomes, addressing the learning needs of English learners and students with disabilities, and serving schools in rural areas. The Secretary could also reserve funds for inducement prizes to drive breakthrough innovations in education or for dramatic and innovative approaches to improving educational outcomes.

In addition to developing and scaling up programs through i3 that have demonstrated success and working to discover the next generation of innovative solutions, we want the reauthorized ESEA to support many effective strategies that are already in broad use. Those include innovative strategies such as charter schools, full-service community schools, Promise Neighborhoods, virtual schools, magnet schools, and early college high schools – of which I know you are a strong supporter, as well as whole school reforms such as lengthening the school day or year, and transforming school culture.

Conclusion

Innovation in education is more than just trying something new. It's about implementing and expanding strategies that improve outcomes. To help drive innovation in education, the Department of Education will look to the field for the best ideas, ideas that typically come from local educators. And we will offer incentives to States, districts, and nonprofit organizations to work together on efforts to implement and share effective strategies, evaluate and enhance them, ensure their long-term sustainability, and bring them to scale.