



AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION

Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics®

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July 25, 2017

Thomas W. Brock  
Acting Director  
Institute of Education Sciences  
550 12th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Dr. Brock,

I write to express our concern for the decision not to issue the solicitations this year for the Statistical and Research Methodology in Education (SRME) program and the Research Training (RT) program. While we understand well that difficult decisions must be made in the current budget environment, we believe these programs are essential to the long-term success of all of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) research programs.

The SRME program mission, as stated in IES materials, is “to provide rigorous evidence on which to ground education practice and policy and to encourage its use.” With its foundational role for other research, the SRME program should be funded especially during difficult funding times to help ensure high quality research and policymaking. The concern of recent years for reproducible, robust research makes the SRME program all the more important.

The tremendous strides in education research in the past 20 years underscore the important role of the SRME program. One manifestation of this success is the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), which, as you know very well, provides decision makers with information about effective interventions in reading, math, science, dropout prevention, and more. Many of these advances, and confidence in the studies reported in the WWC, would not be possible without strong statistical methods underpinning the study designs and analyses.

In particular, projects funded under the SRME program have ensured accurate analysis of studies that are conducted at the school or district level, advanced power analysis methods to ensure that the money spent on research is put to good use, and examination of methods to determine what interventions work best for whom—again a particularly important topic in times of limited resources.

Despite these successes, education research continues to have methodological challenges that need addressing. Many of these relate to how to most efficiently and effectively use existing studies and data to answer remaining important questions in education. Questions such as how existing studies can best be used to inform local decision making, how to make best use of

administrative data and reduce burden for students and teachers across the country, how to identify the mechanisms of action underlying interventions, and how to combine information across studies of similar topics.

In short, the lack of funding for methodological projects will mean that education research cannot take full advantage of data that already exists, or ensure that future studies are done in the most rigorous and efficient ways.

The temporary discontinuation of the training grants and Early Career SRME programs could also represent a step back from education research for coming generations. This program has led generations of doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows to become education researchers. In a time when encouraging a new generation of education researchers is vital, not funding the two training programs could cause current students or students considering entering graduate school to rethink their plans. Continuity in this program is essential for its success.

Given the importance of these programs to the IES long-term research programs, we urge these programs be prioritized in future years. Further, if recent FY18 budget developments allow, we respectfully urge reconsideration of the decision not to solicit proposals for these programs this year to ensure continuity in the engagement of new education researchers over time and academic generations, to develop new approaches, and to extend and improve existing methods.

In closing, we reiterate our overall support for IES and thank you for your leadership in a challenging budget environment. The American Statistical Association will continue to be an advocate for the IES through the Friends of IES.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barry D. Nussbaum".

Barry D. Nussbaum  
President, American Statistical Association