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**The Emerging Era of Knowledge Utilization:  
The Impact of NCLB & the Education Sciences Reform Act on Our Field**

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Those looking for change in education research this past year did not have to look far. It is no exaggeration to say that federal policy regarding education research, development, and dissemination witnessed more change in the past 12 months than in the previous three decades or more.

The enactment of two critically important pieces of federal legislation, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Education Sciences Reform Act, brought research, development, dissemination, and technical assistance to the forefront of K-12 education.

Terms such as “scientifically based research” and “randomized field trials” have quickly gained currency among policy leaders, members of the news media, and educators. More importantly, these laws will forge a renewed focus on knowledge utilization that will forever change the field while bringing innovations to K-12 classrooms nationwide.

NCLB mandates the use of “scientifically based research” in a variety of federal programs, especially those dealing with reading instruction. The act clearly makes knowledge gained from education R&D the central driver of our nation’s efforts to ensure no child is left behind. High-quality research and applications can provide the data and evidence needed for academic success. They can also put new innovations into practice. Because of NCLB, there has never been a greater need for a strong, education knowledge infrastructure that includes research,

development, dissemination, technical assistance, professional development, evaluation, and other research-based applications. The U.S. Department of Education is now working with agencies across the country to implement the law's provisions.

The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 further emphasizes and expands the role of education research, development, and dissemination by, among other things:

- Promoting research to practice and the implementation of the efforts to leave no child behind.
- Minimizing the negative effects of politics on education research while affirming the federal role in education research and development.
- Increasing funding in response to greater needs at the local and state levels.
- Clarifying and simplifying the Department of Education's mission and operations for research, statistics, and evaluation.
- Establishing the new Institute of Education Sciences, which Congress created at the Department of Education in order to strengthen research and development in K-12 education.
- Sustaining the Regional Educational Laboratories, refining the National Research and Development Centers, and expanding the Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers.

Together, these provisions will bring change to our field and to educators and students at the local and state levels.

The basic thrust of the Education Sciences Reform Act is to find out what works by identification and use of evidence-based research programs. Ideally all parties – students, teachers, taxpayers and policy leaders – will benefit through the development of *proven* education initiatives. Researchers and producers of education knowledge will benefit, too, through increased demand and funding.

At the same time greater pressures will emerge. Researchers and educators will be *required* to show results. Those who don't will find the funding for their programs cut or eliminated.

Time will also emerge as a pressure. "Once we establish what works, everyone will want those programs to work immediately," one education policy leader told me.

But, as we know, education success does not come easy even when there is sound research to point the way. There are many variables in the education environment. At a minimum, all eight cylinders of the education engine – challenging standards, effective teachers, aligned curriculum, rigorous assessment, school leadership, parental involvement, adequate funding, and engaged students – must work in harmony to create academic success.

We can either manage change or be managed by it. By embracing change and engaging in open dialogue about our successes and failures, the new federal laws can be implemented to everyone's benefit. Five years from now, when Congress considers the laws for reauthorization, our education knowledge industry will be at the forefront, demonstrating "what works." At that time, the new era of knowledge utilization will have finally arrived.

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