

**U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
FY15 Hearing: Driving Innovation through Federal Investments**

Tuesday, April 29th, 2:30 pm
Dirksen Senate Office Building, SD-G50

Testimony of Education Northwest

Submitted by
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I am pleased to submit this testimony of behalf of the Education Northwest Board of Directors. Education Northwest is located in Portland, Oregon. The board is composed of education stakeholders in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington; including the Chief State School Officers of each of those states as well as district, school, and community leaders. We were founded in 1966 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization to serve as one of the original Regional Educational Laboratories (REL). Today, in addition to managing REL Northwest, we provide research, evaluation, and technical assistance services to strengthen schools and communities throughout the Northwest and the nation through nearly 200 projects per year. I hope that this testimony will help inform the Committee's efforts to determine how federal investments in research and development can spur further education innovation and improvement across many social sectors, including education.

I believe that it is crucial to make a fundamental link between innovation and improvement. Our organization promotes and supports innovation in education because we know that it can help us get better results, through improved policy and practice in critical areas such as educator effectiveness, English language learning, rural and Native education, and school turnaround. We are all too aware that current solutions are often inadequate to our improvement needs. However, we reject innovation for the sake of innovation. Instead, we practice and advocate for *evidence-informed innovation*—for taking chances on new solutions, while always maintaining a rigorous eye on results that lead to continuous refinement and improvement. Otherwise, it is too easy for today's "innovation" to become tomorrow's entrenched practice. To adapt one of President Reagan's well-known phrases, we believe we must "innovate, but verify." That is, we believe that innovations should be tested at each point in their development, starting from user testing at the prototype phase, through rigorous evaluation before scale-up, and ongoing use of data for continuous improvement.

The federal government currently plays an important role in helping educators to innovate but verify. We believe that it can and should do more. Current federal funding for education research and development (R&D) and technical assistance through the U.S. Department of Education—including the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and other agencies—helps states, districts, schools, and teachers adopt and implement novel approaches that promise success for teachers and students alike.

Efforts such as the Regional Educational Laboratories, Comprehensive Centers, and IES research grant programs provide some of this crucial support. They do so, for example, by helping education decision makers to identify innovative and potentially promising programs; design, implement, and test— by using data—the effectiveness of locally designed improvement approaches; and use data for ongoing improvement.

Just as we don't advocate innovation for its own sake, neither do we argue for increased funding that is not tied to results. The following are just some examples of REL Northwest support activities that are helping to promote innovative practice and policy.

At the practice level, we are helping Washington educators with program evaluation and support for English language learners in a South Seattle collective impact project. In Oregon, we support educators to get better results by informing our local district partners on how to reduce discriminatory discipline policies by using rigorous research in the design and then data in the testing of innovative approaches. In Montana, we are working with local district partners to design, implement, and test new “early warning systems” that identify students that are likely to drop out of school and then find innovative approaches to increase graduation.

In an example from at the policy level, we are helping the state of Alaska identify and analyze higher education attendance and other early adult outcomes to design stronger college and career readiness approaches, including an innovative statewide performance scholarship program. Recently, our work in the state was hailed by the Governor's education aide, who stated that the REL Northwest's work “is going to help Governor Parnell's Alaska Performance Scholarship program; it's going to inform that program, and I think it will help the Governor and the legislature fulfill employment needs with Alaska industry and business.”

These are some of examples from just one federal program—the Regional Educational Laboratory Program—that is promoting innovation and getting results in the Northwest. However, a program like the Comprehensive Centers, which has equally strong successes to share, continues to experience cuts in funding. Without ongoing and increased support, the promise of evidence-formed innovation will not be met.

The Education Northwest Board of Directors urges the committee to continue to explore ways to invest in innovation in education that will pay dividends for students and society for years to come.

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