



Meeting of National Board for Education Sciences Looks to Past, Present, and Future

Among the actions of the National Board for Education Sciences at its quarterly meeting on May 21–22 were (1) a look at the recent past through consideration of a report the Board is preparing for Congress about the work of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) from its beginning in 2002, (2) consideration of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) issues affecting education researchers seeking to use student records in research, and (3) approval of recommendations for the future reauthorization of the IES.

One of the major responsibilities of the Board is to submit a status report about IES to the appropriate congressional committees and to the Secretary of Education and the Director of IES. In the report the Board will take stock of the work of IES during its first 5 years and is charged with providing “any recommendations regarding any actions that may be taken to enhance the ability of the Institute to carry out its priorities and mission.” The Board has approached this task by selecting an external evaluation group to review materials, conduct interviews, and provide some evaluative information that will form the core of its report. The report of the consultants is to be available to the Board at the end of June.

An immediate issue before the Board at its May meeting was to address the restrictions of FERPA on the conduct of education research, especially problematic in the context of new statewide longitudinal databases. During the meeting, the Board heard from several experts about the utility of these new administrative databases for conducting education research; one of the experts was Jane Hannaway of the Urban Institute, who characterized herself as a “cheerleader for the research potential of statewide

databases.” At issue at the moment is the adequacy of proposed regulations drafted by the U.S. Department of Education promising to address at least some of the problems encountered by researchers. Constance Citro of the National Research Council’s (NRC) Committee on National Statistics reminded the Board that effectively aligning research access and privacy protection is not a new topic—she presented an overview of the history of research privacy issues and the many reports on the subject by the National Academy of Sciences over a 30-year period. Citro also made mention of the recent NRC-AERA workshop related to FERPA. (For a fuller discussion of FERPA, see “From the Desk of the Executive Director” in this issue of *Educational Researcher*, page 302.)

In considering this topic, the Board also had before it public comments about the proposed regulations that were submitted by several organizations, including the comments crafted by AERA, the American Statistical Association, and the Consortium of Social Science Associations. Following discussion, the Board adopted the following general resolution:

The Board commends the Secretary and the Department of Education for moving forward in developing new regulations and guidance about how to maintain confidentiality of educational data under FERPA while also providing for research uses of student and school data. We urge the Department to finalize the published draft regulations quickly, incorporating clarifications consistent with the Board’s prior resolution to make longitudinal data available for research.

The Board also looked to the future of IES by adopting a set of recommendations

for its reauthorization, possibly next winter. The Board had appointed a legislative committee to propose recommendations about the reauthorization and gave the committee the mandate of providing recommendations that generally continued IES’s present structure, which the Board considers highly effective.

In accepting the recommendations of the legislative committee, the Board encountered one area of controversy: how to appoint the U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics. The committee first recommended that the selection process be modified by having the IES Director appoint the Commissioner in the manner of its other three center directors. The report of the committee that was considered in May, however, recommended that the current process not be changed and that the appointment continue to be made by the U.S. President with Senate confirmation. However, following discussion, the Board reverted to the original proposal and now will recommend that in the future the U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics be appointed by the IES Director.

The Board meetings typically include reports from the four IES research centers (the National Center for Education Research, the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Center for Special Education Research, and the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance). At this meeting, considerable interest was generated by one aspect of the report provided by the U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics, Mark Schneider. Schneider observed that the National Center for Education Statistics had been asked to explore the possibility of using computer technology for the government’s large testing programs and had reviewed some of the

advantages that might be provided in so doing. However, Schneider also reported on some of the difficulties encountered in implementing such plans in the schools on a national basis: incompatible technology systems within and among districts, security devices that could not readily be

circumvented and that frustrated efforts to add federal assessment instruments, and the very limited capacity of many schools to provide the on-site technical assistance required for computer-based assessments.

A great deal of information about the responsibilities and activities of the Board

is available on the Internet. Board meeting minutes, responsibilities, reports, and current membership are presented at <http://ies.ed.gov/director/board>. Board meetings are open to the public. The next meeting is scheduled for September 9 and 10 in Washington, D.C.



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