



A Broader, **BOLDER** Approach to Education

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Dr. Jared Bernstein
Office of the Vice President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Dr. Bernstein:

We herein offer suggestions regarding how federal education dollars under ARRA might be used to advance the ideas set forth in A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education (BBA), which lays out a scientifically based, 0-18, school-plus education policy framework for more effectively addressing achievement gaps and improving children's adult outcomes. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan had invited BBA to make such suggestions, but in the limited context of the proposal on state experimentation with school and district inspection systems contained in BBA's recently released Accountability Committee report. Our letter to Secretary Duncan is attached.

First, we urge that the White House use its influence to promote the use of ARRA funding as a means to transform a crisis into a unique opportunity for federal, state and local agencies serving infants, children, youth and their families and communities to coordinate their respective efforts on behalf of improving children's adult outcomes – and help them to remove the structural impediments to doing so. This would foster a more efficient and effective use of ARRA funds. Even more significantly, it would lay a post-ARRA foundation for achieving a long-sought and elusive goal: A more coherent, coordinated and evidence-based approach, across all levels of government, to addressing achievement gaps.

For example, the White House might urge or direct each federal agency that has an ARRA program that is either directly aimed at or related to improving outcomes for children (e.g., ED, HHS, DOJ, DOA, HUD, DOL, NSF, etc.) to encourage their grantees, and perhaps offer them incentives, to work together across stage-agency lines to coordinate their respective services and enable their local ARRA grantees to do the same. Some states and localities already have mechanisms for doing so (e.g., state children's cabinets, community partnerships), while others might be prompted by this signal of federal interest and flexibility to move in this direction. Working

together, individual federal agencies could identify related programs within and among their agencies and make that resource available to their respective grantees.

Grantees should not be told which federal ARRA programs to coordinate or be required to coordinate at all. The point is to stimulate and support innovation. States, preferably with the input of their local ARRA grantees, should be free to submit their best ideas.

For illustrative purposes only, we offer the example of ARRA programs in non-ED agencies that could help ED grantees to pursue ED's overall ARRA priority, as announced in its preliminary RTTT guidance, of "improving results for all students, including early learning, extended learning time, use of technology, preparation for college/career..." A short list includes HHS's Community Health Centers, Child Care, Early Head Start, Head Start and Foster Care programs; DOJ's National Mentoring program; NSF's Math and Science Partnership; HUD's Homeless Prevention and Rapid Reintegration program; and the FCC's Broadband Technology Opportunities program. Working out how ED grantees might coordinate with Medicaid and SCHIP to expand school-based health clinics would be another fruitful direction to explore. Of course, to make for a two-way street, ARRA grantees under relevant non-ED programs must be similarly encouraged to work with state and local ED grantees.

Although encouraging relevant ARRA grantees to coordinate their education and education-related programs is a necessary condition for their doing so, it is not a sufficient one. Federal education and education-related programs have grown up separate and apart; even within agencies, related programs typically operate in isolation from one another. Consequently, the definitions, regulations and guidelines for many similarly-aimed programs have also grown up separate and apart. Not surprisingly, this fragmentation has been largely reproduced at the state level. Not only does this exacerbate the challenges faced by community partnerships that are engaged in stitching together a more coherent, coordinated and seamless approach toward preventing disadvantaged children from being sucked into the vicious cycle of poverty, it also serves as a disincentive for even trying.

Therefore, we also suggest that the administration consider inviting states that wish to pursue this direction to identify federal regulatory and other obstacles to doing so and pledge itself to doing whatever is appropriate and reasonable to help them overcome such obstacles. In some instances, this may entail no more than providing technical assistance in aligning resources across federal program boundaries. But the administration may also want to consider entertaining waiver requests in return for state assurances that the requested regulatory relief would enable them to improve, or minimize reductions in, the level and quality of their pre-recession services for children. The natural experiments this would create are ripe with evaluation opportunities. Even absent a research investment, the information gleaned from states' reporting on federal obstacles to coordination would be a valuable resource for guiding longer-term federal efforts to craft a more coherent, integrated and effective approach to improving outcomes for disadvantaged children.

Our two longer-term suggestions for how the White House could advance the ideas set forth in BBA build on the above. They also build out President Obama's major BBA-like proposal, the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative, by suggesting ways to enable a wider uptake of this schools-plus approach.

First, we urge that the President create a cabinet-level interagency council involving key representatives from all the federal agencies running programs related to children, youth and families – which amounts to almost every agency – and charge it with developing recommendations for how these programs could be more effectively

aligned and coordinated, within and across agencies, to enhance federal, state and local capacity to provide a continuum of effective services that address the key scientifically-determined influences (e.g., prenatal care, maternal and child physical and emotional health, cognitive and social development, parent education, formal schooling, etc..) on children's adult outcomes. (Leaving aside the important question of program quality or adequacy of funding, we note that almost every federal agency has one or more programs targeted on these influences.)

The template for creating this interagency council could come from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, which was established in 1997 through Executive Order 13045. That Forum publishes an annual report, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* (more on this below), which could serve as a results-oriented framework to guide the proposed interagency council's work.

Among the tasks this interagency council might pursue is to (1) invite the states to submit recommendations, including examples of how their proposals would enable them to strengthen their capacity to improve outcomes for children; (2) solicit reports or testimony from representatives of community partnerships engaged in trying to provide a comprehensive continuum of education and education-related services to learn about the opportunities and barriers they faced in accessing and coordinating relevant federal and state-level funding streams/programs; (3) review the definitions, guidelines and regulations of related existing programs for commonalities and discrepancies that may affect state and local capacity to pursue a coordinated continuum of child, youth and family services; (4) gather information on the extent of federal cross-agency and cross-program technical assistance; and (5) investigate procedures that would allow for the consideration of how new education and education-related programs, either in the bill or federal implementation stage or both, relate to and affect the administration of relevant pre-existing programs.

Our second suggestion for how the White House could advance BBA's school-plus policy perspective is to expand *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* to include state-by-state reporting.

This highly regarded annual report is produced by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, which presently includes 22 Federal agencies, as well as partners in private research organizations. The Forum is "charged with developing priorities for collecting enhanced data on children and youth, improving the reporting and dissemination of [such] information... to the policy community and the general public, and producing more complete data on children at the state and local levels."

America's Children reports on their demographic background; family and social environment; economic circumstances; health care; physical environment and safety; behavior; education; and health. While some indicators are missing, many of which the Forum itself calls attention to, the report comes close to covering the key scientifically-identified influences on children's adult outcomes. It is a data model of a school-plus perspective on education.

However, while the report is highly influential at the national level, it has little traction at the state and local levels precisely because the data are national only. This was also the case with the National Assessment of Educational Progress before state-level NAEP was added. The impact of that shift was huge: from relative obscurity, NAEP results now exert a powerful influence on opinion leaders and on federal, state and local education policy.

America's Children already collects a lot of state-level data, so augmenting the report with comparable state data from existing national data sets would produce a big payoff at a modest cost. Some national samples, however, are too small to permit state-level estimates for each of the report's indicators. Although now may not be the time for federal or state agencies to take on new data-collection challenges, the foundation could be laid for full state reporting in *America's Children* by asking the Forum to investigate and report on the feasibility of doing so. Such a request would be consistent with the Forum's charge.

This document was prepared for BBA by Christopher Cross, Martin Orland, and Bella Rosenberg. They and we would be pleased to elaborate further on these ideas with you and any of your colleagues, if that is appropriate. Thank you again for this opportunity to share our thinking.

Sincerely,

Helen Ladd

Pedro Noguera

Thomas Payzant

Co-chairs, "A Broader Bolder Approach to Education."