A CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON
INCLUSIVE EVIDENCE
by
THE FRIENDS OF EVIDENCE

We believe that the U.S. is on the verge of a paradigm shift in how we approach the challenge of building a stronger and more useful evidence- base for social policy. This shift is occurring because the most serious problems we face can only be solved by new ways of working, which in turn require the creation and utilization of knowledge in new and accelerated ways and from multiple sources. Research, program evaluations and real- time learning from the innovations that are tackling the toughest problems of intergenerational poverty, disinvested neighborhoods and persistent equity gaps will all be necessary to inform social policy decisions and promote wise, cost-effective investments.

We believe that this paradigm shift is on its way, but as a group of people committed to more rapid change and improvement in human lives on a more massive scale we seek to hasten its adoption.

A RICHER KNOWLEDGE BASE

Like many others working to achieve better results for children and families in disinvested neighborhoods, we worry that prevailing approaches to generating, analyzing, assessing and applying evidence are not sufficiently far-reaching. We need a richer knowledge base to adequately inform decision-making in the social sphere about:

- Wise resource allocation
- Smart ways to design, improve, adapt and scale up effective programs, policies and systems
- Generalizing appropriately from the data produced in artificially controlled circumstances to a range of real-world settings, and
- Learning from the multiple points of intervention that combine to achieve synergy and economies of scale

Until now, the evidence that has informed efforts to improve outcomes for children,

families, and communities has come largely from program evaluations, with the most recognized of those involving experimental methods – randomized controlled trials – applied to carefully circumscribed programs.

However useful in identifying evidence-based program models, this approach provides only a part of the evidence we now need. Solutions to large, complex and urgent social problems, such as high rates of concentrated poverty, disinvested communities, and race- and income- based disparities in health, well-being, and education outcomes, involve changing the operations of multi- layered, interactive systems as well as changing the community conditions that are the context for these problems. To maintain effectiveness, complex interventions focus on data, continuous learning, and collaborative efforts toward shared results – uniting the work of many people, organizations and systems to achieve "collective impact" on shared goals. The solutions themselves must be adapted as they are implemented over time and in a variety of contexts, taking into account components that are difficult to quantify through traditional evaluative approaches.

> *Now is the time to support greater effectiveness and innovation by infusing the process of evidence gathering and analysis with the best learning from both research and experience.*

The most sustainable of these solutions draw on both research and experience, including the assets and wisdom of parents and neighborhood residents.

MULTIPLE SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

The changing nature of solutions requires analytic methods of comparable range and flexibility, extracting and assembling knowledge and evidence from multiple sources. Our goal must be a richer knowledge base that brings together findings from basic research, from program evaluations, from careful documentation and analysis of implementation, and from a deeper understanding of context. At a minimum, this richer knowledge base draws upon:

Evidence from programs and projects:

- Rigorous program evaluations, including those using randomized trials, to identify programmatic interventions that have been effective in improving outcomes in a range of populations.

- Information about the implementation of interventions, going beyond yes/no judgments about "what works" to explain *why, how, for whom, and under what conditions* policies programs, practices, and systems accomplish desired results.

- Cross-cutting research that identifies the core components of successful interventions

- Practice, performance and real-time empirical observation

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Evidence that identifies contextual components of effective interventions:

- Description and assessment of the infrastructure and contextual conditions required to support high quality, sustainable interventions

Evidence from basic research:

- Findings from basic science, including neuroscience and human development, that point to new opportunities to intervene, and to expand on or modify the elements of interventions that have previously not reached their potential with underserved or inadequately served populations

- Findings to guide the identification of measures of progress, and to inform expectations about the time spans in which results are likely to be observable

- Identification of risk and protective factors that point to areas where interventions should focus to become more effective; identification of unrealized opportunities to improve outcomes.

THE RESULTS

We believe that the more inclusive approach to building the knowledge base that we advocate, with its richer array of evidence, will lead to:

- More reliable, transparent and consistent forms of accountability

- Greater knowledge of where needs are greatest, and where opportunities to invest and intervene are most promising

- A strengthened capacity to adapt and innovate in response to unique local circumstances, changing conditions, and to the findings of new research

- New learning from experience and from research applicable to a wider variety of populations to reduce race- and income- based disparities.

- The widespread adoption of processes of continuous rapid learning and improvement

- The engagement of community members in creating the knowledge base by providing local wisdom, and in understanding the expanded role of evidence.

- A greater focus on dealing explicitly with the role of race, income, ethnicity, and lack of opportunities in contributing to inequitable outcomes.

- A deeper and wider understanding of how improved outcomes can be achieved, and a deeper and wider commitment to achieving them.

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