

This discussion group, hosted by the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) and funded by the William T. Grant Foundation, is the second of two that focused on the use of research in education policy and practice. Participants were provided with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the definition, acquisition, interpretation, and use of research across the education policy, practice, and research communities.

*What is an Intermediary?*

Dr. Vivian Tseng, Vice President of Programs for the William T. Grant Foundation, provided background information for the participants regarding the role of intermediaries as bridging the gap between researchers and policy and practice. Intermediaries have an important role in facilitating two-way communication between stakeholder groups and can also assist in the effective integration of research into policy decisions and education practice.

*What do we know about Intermediaries?*

Participants then heard from three panels, the first of which painted the landscape of intermediaries. This first panel included Senior Researcher **Peg Goertz**, CPRE, University of Pennsylvania and Professor **Cynthia Coburn**, Northwestern University. Dr. Goertz discussed her work regarding the role of intermediaries in the use of research by state education agencies (SEAs). The study showed that about 30 percent of SEA staff named external sources of research and research acquisition by SEAs depended on SEA capacity, intermediary environments in the states, policy context and partnership history, as well as the qualities of external sources. Dr. Goertz also highlighted the need to build a culture of research in SEAs and encourage connections between SEAs and intermediaries as knowledge brokers. Professor Coburn's presentation focused on the research-practice partnerships (RPPs) that exist at the district level. Dr. Coburn identifies such partnerships as long-term collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are organized to investigate problems of practice and solutions for improving system outcomes. These partnerships can be important to practitioners as districts and schools frequently define the research, which increases its usability at the local level. Additionally, RPPs can assist in building district capacity to engage with research and use it by improving district capacity.

*What is the Role of Federally-Funded Intermediaries?*

The second panel included **Steve Fleischman**, Chief Executive Officer from Education Northwest and **Martin Orland**, Director of Evaluation and Policy Research at the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center WestEd. Mr. Fleischman spoke about the focus of Education Northwest on promoting research alliances that encourage greater interaction among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Stakeholders can establish partnerships with Regional Education Laboratories (RELs) to apply research and data to education issues. Mr. Fleischman indicated that one of the most important aspects of research alliances is to build trusting relationships among the participants. He also shared key policy implications for increasing research use by making sure the research is contextualized, easy to absorb and aided by

intermediaries. Dr. Orland discussed the role of Comprehensive Assistance Centers (CACs) as intermediary research organizations. CACs are sources of technical assistance and the current emphasis of CACs work is on state-level improvements and reform. Dr. Orland shared keys for successful work of intermediaries: building trust, understanding the local context, the importance of research timeliness, flexibility, and emphasis on sound research that can be used effectively.

#### *How do Intermediaries work at the Local Level?*

The third and final panel included **Ray Hart**, Director of Research, Council of Great City Schools and **Faith Connolly**, Executive Director, Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC). Mr. Hart spoke extensively on the role of intermediaries integrating research into practice at the local level. He indicated that the research partnerships go beyond the research and focus on developing support systems. Mr. Hart also stated that foundations could play a pivotal role in funding research and evaluation to tap into this local research capacity. Ms. Connolly spoke on the participatory model of developing research agendas, which includes a variety of stakeholders. The BERC organizes monthly informal meetings with districts and cross-functional working groups with district staff in order to build two-way communication pathways. While Ms. Connolly highlighted several successful examples of collaboration, she indicated that leadership and building trustful relationships among stakeholders are still areas of challenge for intermediary work.

#### *Final Thoughts*

Following the three panel discussions, participants were broken into three groups to examine three key questions: First, what are the key roles your organization plays in connecting research with policy or practice? Second, what is the biggest challenge to doing that work successfully? Finally, what is one strategy that has brought you success in doing this intermediary work? Participant discussion yielded the following major themes. Participants identified a critical need to move research from the academic base to the practitioner base. Intermediaries are vital for this effort. Additionally, building infrastructure, funding support and developing new and innovative ways to communicate in an easily digestible format is important to encourage the use of research at local levels. Intermediaries may have different roles, including the brokering of research funding, the dissemination of research, and building capacity at the state level to connect researchers with policymakers. These efforts are not without challenges and research still needs to be contextualized for local conditions. Thus, there is a major need for local political will to integrate research into practice. Finally, intermediaries should embrace the role of honest brokers and facilitate the adoption of evidence-based and research-based policies through apolitical efforts.

In closing the session, Dr. Tseng highlighted four conclusions, derived from the discussion, as to when intermediary work can be successful:

- The research is contextualized to meet local needs;
- There is an emphasis on building trusting relationships among all stakeholders;

- There is an appropriate balance between the timeliness of the research and the rigor of the research;
- There is a strong organizational capacity within agencies, at the district level, among intermediaries and among researchers.

Dr. Tseng also identified a major challenge moving forward: promoting strategies for doing intermediary work well. General consensus was achieved within the discussion group in defining the nature of the problem connecting researchers to policymakers and practitioners; however, taking action to encourage the use of intermediaries is the next critical step in integrating research into education policy and practice.