

New Education R&D Lab Aims to Advance Innovations in Public Education

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NEW YORK – A new education research and development laboratory at Harvard University will identify and advance strategies to improve student achievement in America’s public schools, The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation announced today at the Clinton Global Initiative.

The goal of the Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard University (EdLabs), funded in part by a \$6 million grant from The Broad Foundation, is to foster innovation and objective measurement of the effectiveness of urban K-12 school district programs and practices through rigorous research.

“The National Institutes of Health is the engine for scientific and medical research, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency develops innovations in technology and security, but K-12 education has had no R&D agency that identifies and researches the most effective innovations in our public schools,” said Eli Broad, entrepreneur businessman and founder of The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundations. “There are pockets of innovation in K-12 public education today – innovations such as high-performing charter schools like KIPP and student incentives that increase academic performance. But we need to do more. In our nine years of working with school districts around the country, we have identified the need for robust research and development to fuel the work of reform-minded education leaders and advance innovative practices. We believe that EdLabs is the R&D entity that will fulfill that need.”

To jumpstart the \$44 million, three-year research and development initiative, EdLabs will partner with three of the largest urban school systems in the country: New York City Department of Education, Chicago Public Schools, and the District of Columbia Public Schools. EdLabs will bring together top scholars from a broad range of academic fields and will connect them with its own R&D teams that will be embedded in these three school districts.

“America was built on innovation, yet there has been far too little of it in education even though we are not getting the results we need or that our children deserve,” said New York City Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein. “EdLabs will encourage creative thinking to address the crisis in our classrooms and help us to understand what works and doesn’t work when it comes to improving outcomes for our students. I applaud The Broad Foundation, Harvard University, and Dr. Roland Fryer for their commitment to this ground-breaking initiative.”

“We are honored to be a part of this cutting-edge institute,” said D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee. “We believe that all children, regardless of background and circumstance, can achieve at the highest levels, and we want to ensure that our decisions at all levels are guided by the kind of robust data, analysis and innovative thinking EdLabs will provide.”

The core work of EdLabs will include:

1. Building a core database of student level data to develop a detailed understanding of factors affecting student performance in Chicago, New York City and Washington, D.C. EdLabs will use this new data to conduct rigorous empirical analyses to identify key leverage points for innovations.
2. Developing and implementing new ideas that will be piloted in schools in the three partner districts. EdLabs and the partner districts have already designed programs that will examine student motivation through student incentives. The programs are designed to investigate whether incentives change student behavior and attitudes toward academic achievement – and thus improve academic performance.
3. Evaluating existing programs and practices in the three partner school districts through a rigorous scientific lens to determine whether or not they are improving student achievement. EdLabs will also award a “Seal of Approval” for programs and interventions that work.
4. Disseminating research findings to key policy-makers and educators and quantifying the expected “student return from an investment” in a school or a district to help leaders direct their limited resources into high-return programs and initiatives.

EdLabs will be headed by Roland G. Fryer, Jr., who will also serve as lead researcher. A 30-year-old Harvard economics professor who is one of the youngest African-Americans to receive tenure at the prestigious university, Fryer has researched the issue of racial inequality for the past decade. He has published papers on topics such as the racial achievement gap, the causes and consequences of distinctively black names and affirmative action. Fryer was recently featured on CNN’s series, “Black in America,” and has been named by *Fortune* Magazine as one of America’s “most influential minorities.”

“If we aim to establish true equality of opportunity in education, we must be willing to take risks and explore innovative strategies,” said Fryer. “The 'same-old' strategies have failed generations of students. There have been pockets of progress and beacons of hope, but not systematic changes in how we educate urban youth. Transformative thinking, along with a tough-minded, rigorous approach to designing and evaluating innovative education reforms, is essential if we want to truly improve. I would like to thank The Broad Foundation and Harvard University for supporting a long overdue initiative to apply the same scientific standards of research and analysis to education reform as is expected in fields like medicine and technological development.”

In addition to a grant from The Broad Foundation, EdLabs will receive support from Harvard University, the three participating school districts and other foundations.

EdLabs will be housed administratively within the Institute for Quantitative Social Science (IQSS) in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University. IQSS has helped EdLabs build the infrastructure it needs to make its research possible and will continue to play an administrative advisory role going forward.

For more information about the Education Innovation Laboratory at Harvard University, please visit www.EdLabs.harvard.edu.

The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation is a national venture philanthropy established by Edythe and Eli Broad, a renowned business leader who founded two Fortune 500 companies, SunAmerica Inc. and KB Home. Based in Los Angeles, The Broad Foundation’s mission is to dramatically improve K-12 urban public education through better governance, management, labor relations and competition. The Broad Foundation’s Internet address is www.broadfoundation.org.

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