Low Marks for Education Funding Priorities

ANYONE INVOLVED SUBSTANTIALLY IN SCIENCE EDUCATION DURING THE PAST FIFTY YEARS will see the irony in the decision by the Office and Management and Budget (OMB) to trim the federal government’s science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs on the grounds that many of them lack evaluation data on efficacy (“An invisible hand behind plan to realign U.S. science education,” J. Mervis, News Focus, 26 July, p. 338). Although federal funding often supported formative evaluation (assessment in the pilot phase to improve the program itself) during the development of new curricula, it was virtually impossible to secure funding for summative evaluation (assessment of effectiveness after implementation) because of the costs and time frames involved. At the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (1), where the value of summative evaluation always has been self-evident, we often lamented that the federal government funded a series of 90-meter dashes, supporting development of new instructional materials but not their evaluation. Funding from the Institute for Education Sciences for efficacy trials (2) that provide one type of summative evaluation constitutes some progress, but it is not enough.

It is perverse for OMB to blame STEM projects for deficiencies that were inherent in the government’s funding priorities. Perhaps an evaluation of those priorities is in order.

JOSEPH D. MCMINNERY
Executive Vice President, American Society of Human Genetics, Bethesda, MD 20814, USA. E-mail: j mcminnery@ashg.org

References
1. Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (www.bscs.org).

Bayes’ Confidence

NEITHER THE PERSPECTIVE “BAYES’ THEOREM in the 21st century” (B. Efron, Editorial, 26 July, p. 317) in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines through organizations such as the Committee on Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine (CWSEM). Targeting interventions at early career researchers is vital.

The Wellcome Trust’s Basic Scientist Career Tracker (1) demonstrates the disproportionate number of women exiting academia early in their careers. Although an academic research career brings rewards, it remains a risky long-term career choice (2), and as McNutt describes, childbearing years typically coincide with the time when a faculty member needs to build a strong portfolio and gain tenure, thereby securing a less risky future.

Academia needs to attract and retain high-quality, highly trained researchers; research funders such as the Wellcome Trust can play an important role by following these steps: (i) Funders need to ensure that career awareness and mentorship are integral components of their training provision. (ii) Funders must ensure that their eligibility and/or funding guidelines do not discriminate against certain researchers (for example, a bias in funding decisions toward grant applications that include a move between institutions may inadvertently discriminate against those with established local ties). (iii) Funders need to promote and develop opportunities for researchers to use their funding flexibly, including options for career breaks, reentry fellowships, opportunities to work in posts other than as a principal investigator, and part-time schedules. (iv) We need to expand the opportunities for female role models working across academia to tell their story; this should be a core component of training programs.

ELIZABETH ALLEN,* HALINA SUWALOWSKA, DAVID LYNN
Strategic Planning and Policy Unit, Wellcome Trust, London, NWI 2BE, UK.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: lallen@wellcome.ac.uk

Reference

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

This Week in Science: “Pushy black hole” (6 September, p. 1043). The last line should be “possibly limiting star formation and galaxy growth” instead of “possibly contributing to star formation and galaxy growth.” The HTML and PDF versions online have been corrected.

Reports: “Pandoraviruses: Amoeba viruses with genomes up to 2.5 Mb reaching that of parasitic eukaryotes” by N. Philippe et al. (“25 July, p. 203). In the first sentence of the legend to Fig. 1, the “C1” and “C2” should not have been italicized, as they refer to panels A1/A2 and B1/B2 and not to references 1 and 2. In the legend to Fig. 1E, the “a” and “b” labels should have been transposed. In addition, a reference to panels B1 and B2 is now included. In the acknowledgments, the GenBank accession numbers were incorrectly listed. They should read K977571 and K977570 (not K977471 and K977470). Also, the financial support of the Provence-Côte-d’Azur Région was missing. The HTML and PDF versions online have been corrected.

Letters to the Editor

Letters (~300 words) discuss material published in Science in the past 3 months or matters of general interest. Letters are not acknowledged upon receipt. Whether published in full or in part, letters are subject to editing for clarity and space. Letters submitted, published, or posted elsewhere, in print or online, will be disqualified. To submit a letter, go to www.submit2science.org.