

Report Shines Light on STEM Strengths and Weaknesses

If the U.S. just applied the skills it already has, many of the problems it faces as a nation could be solved. That is the opinion of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) in a newly released report, *Prepare and Inspire: K-12 Education in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) for America's Future*.

PCAST, co-chaired by ASCB member Eric Lander, issued the report outlining what needs to be done to revitalize the U.S. science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education system. In a White House press release announcing the report, Lander said, "The recommendations in this report have great catalytic potential and, if implemented, could transform STEM education in America." The report suggests applying many of the U.S.'s assets in science, mathematics, and engineering within the educational system to improve STEM education. According to the report, a revitalization of the educational system would result in an American economic renewal.

The report recommends that the U.S. federal

government should:

- Recruit and hire 100,000 STEM teachers over the next 10 years
- Create a STEM master teacher corps to recognize and reward the top 5% of U.S. STEM teachers
- Create 1,000 STEM-focused schools over the next 10 years
- Develop a DARPA-like program for education (DARPA, or the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, is the U.S. Defense Department agency responsible for the development of new technology for use by the U.S. military)

- Support the development of state-based, shared educational standards in science and math

PCAST also predicts that the federal government could implement many of the recommendations in the report with existing funds. Implementation of all of the report's recommendations would cost approximately \$1 billion per year.

To read the complete report, go to www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/ostp/pcast. ■
—Kevin M. Wilson



Eric Lander

NIH Center Becomes Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities

The U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) has formally announced the transition of the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD) to the Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. The change was mandated in the healthcare reform legislation passed by Congress earlier this year.

Under the new law, all of the responsibilities of the Center, including the coordination of the NIH's health research

portfolio, were transferred to the new Institute.

In announcing the change, NIH Director Francis Collins said, "This change by Congress reflects the importance of studying the issue of health disparities with an even greater intensity. We need to learn much more about what causes disparities—including the role of society, the environment, and genes—and to find effective ways of overcoming or changing them." ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

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U.S. Senate Approves Next NSF Head

Don't believe everything you read in the newspaper; the U.S. Congress can get things done quickly. In June 2010, U.S. President Obama nominated Subra Suresh, dean of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) School of Engineering, to be the next director of the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). Four short months later, the U.S. Senate unanimously confirmed Suresh, with no debate and no hearings. (Four months may not seem quick, but according to the White House website, 21% of the nominations and appointments made by the White House are still awaiting confirmation by the U.S. Senate. (Francisco Sanchez, nominated by President

Obama on April 20, 2009, to be Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade, is still waiting to be confirmed by the Senate.)

Suresh succeeds Arden Bement, who served as NSF head from 2004 to 2010. The NSF Director term is six years. Suresh becomes director at a good time for the NSF. Despite difficult economic times and efforts to control the growth of federal spending, the NSF has received significant budget increases recently. In FY10, it received a 6.7% increase and it is expected to receive an increase between 7% and 8% when Congress approves the FY11 federal budget. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

NIH Funds Alternative for the Best and the Brightest

Over the next five years, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) will spend \$60 million on a program that will help exceptional young investigators navigate the traditional postdoctoral training system into academic positions of their own.

The new program, the NIH Director's Early Independence Award (EIA), was designed in response to trends of lengthening time before scientists can start independent careers. In an NIH press release announcing the EIA program, NIH Director Francis Collins said, "The Early Independence Award Program will



Francis Collins

reduce the amount of time these exceptional junior scientists spend in training and allow them to start highly innovative research programs as early in their careers as possible."

The NIH anticipates awarding only 10 awards in the fall of 2010. Individuals can apply for the awards on their own or institutions may recruit individuals to apply. Each EIA recipient will receive up to \$250,000 per year in direct costs for as long as five years.

For more information on the program, go to <http://commonfund.nih.gov/earlyindependence>. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson