

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: **KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

This resource contains three sections:

- I. ESSA statute related to school improvement
- II. Considerations for states providing technical assistance on evidence-based interventions
- III. Considerations if a state is creating a list of evidence-based interventions

ESSA statute related to school improvement

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) states that evidence-based “means an activity, strategy, or intervention that—

(i) demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on—

(I) strong evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;

(II) moderate evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or

(III) promising evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or

(ii)(I) demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and
(II) includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.”

School improvement plans are required to be evidence-based and may use any level of evidence indicated above. Funding for the 7% Title I set aside for school improvement must be used for interventions meeting only the top three tiers of evidence (strong, moderate, promising).

Considerations for technical assistance on evidence-based interventions

Below are considerations for SEAs to inform their ESSA consolidated plans.

a) Needs assessment

- i. Provide technical assistance to LEAs by creating a model or required school-level needs assessment and process for engaging stakeholders (both in and out of school) that incorporates evidence-based factors that influence school performance in order to assess root causes
- ii. Train and partner with LEA and school staff on conducting a needs assessment that surfaces root causes in order to inform the evidence-based practices selected

b) Development and approval of school support and improvement plans

- i. Ensure districts and schools have access to evidence-based interventions for school improvement
 - 1) Direct LEAs and schools to national databases and resources,
 - [What Works Clearinghouse](#), developed by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) (*not* categorized in ESSA evidence tiers; studies included here meet only most rigorous evidence criteria)
 - [Results First Clearinghouse Database](#), developed by the Pew Charitable Trusts (*not* categorized in ESSA evidence tiers; evaluates interventions as rated by eight national databases)
 - [Best Evidence Encyclopedia](#), developed by the Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University (*not* categorized in ESSA evidence tiers)
 - [Evidence for ESSA](#), available February/March 2017 (categorized in ESSA evidence tiers)
 - [RAND report on school leadership interventions under ESSA](#) (categorized in ESSA evidence tiers)
 - [Using Evidence to Create Next Generation High Schools](#), developed by the U.S. Department of Education (*not* categorized in ESSA evidence tiers)
 - [Roadmap to Evidence Based Reform for Low Graduation Rate High Schools](#), developed by the Every Student Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University
 - 2) Develop a state-approved list of evidence-based interventions
 - 3) Develop an evidence-based framework for school improvement actions
- ii. Conduct research on strategies used within the state that improve schools to further build an evidence-base
- iii. For the most persistently low-performing schools, consider if the list of evidence-based interventions are of a different nature

c) Professional development on matching evidence-based practices to local needs

- i. Provide professional development and clear guidance and tools to schools and LEA staff, directly or through regional entities and/or coaches, on understanding of the full range of evidence-based options, matching root causes from the needs assessment to selected interventions, and how to develop strong implementation plans for selected evidence-based interventions. Making a good match between evidence-based practices and school or district needs is perhaps the most critical element in achieving good results from an evidence-based improvement approach.
 - i. Consider resources such as the [LEA Guide to School Improvement Interventions](#) from the Florida Center on Reading Research to lead a local process of assessing the full range of evidence-based options and how to judge the body of relevant evidence

- ii. Collaborate across the school improvement, research, and special education teams (among others) within the SEA to provide local support. The State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) under IDEA requires similar types of support to LEAs and schools and use of evidence. Combining expertise and resources across teams can bolster SEA capacity to support LEAs and schools.

d) Allocation of Funds

Recipients of school improvement funds (7% Title I set-aside) are required to use evidence-based interventions. To incentivize use of more and better evidence, SEAs could allocate funds based on:

- i. formula with a minimum requirement for relevant and rigorous evidence-based interventions that draw on a full body of evidence rather than just one study.
- ii. competitively, or by a combination of formula and competitive funds, based on inclusion of relevant and rigorous evidence-based interventions that draw on a full body of evidence rather than just one study and use evidence-based interventions tied to priorities in the needs assessment.
- iii. competitively with additional "points" for schools with evidence-based interventions and a strong system of continuous improvement and/or those that set aside program funds for evaluations.

[Note: States could provide a formula grant to all schools for a planning year, and then award funds competitively for implementation of the plan. This allows for support to districts with limited capacity and targeting of resources for maximum impact.]

e) Monitoring and Periodically Reviewing Plans

It is not possible for states to intensively support and monitor implementation for every school in need of improvement. There are ways, however, that a state can support improvement efforts even when they are not directly connected to every school. Here are some options for consideration:

- i. Tier support and monitoring to LEAs based on factors such as the number of schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support and improvement, schools' rate of improvement, district central office capacity, and commitment to change; consider fidelity of implementation of evidence-based approaches and their evidence of impact, not just whether an evidence-based practice is part of the plan.
- ii. Adopt a "learning agenda": take full advantage of available resources offered by public [e.g., Institute for Education Sciences (IES) grants, Regional Education Laboratories (RELs)] and private partners (e.g., research-practice partnerships, foundations)] to rigorously examine impact of interventions coupled with a robust continuous improvement process.

Considerations if a state is creating a list of evidence-based interventions

If the SEA is creating a recommended or required list of evidence-based practices, here are some issues to keep in mind.

- Examine the full body of evidence, not just one study. This will increase the odds that the intervention will improve outcomes.
- Include evidence-based *strategies* or an evidence-based *framework* as well as programs. This helps broaden applicability to a variety of contexts within the state and enables a variety of technical assistance providers who use these strategies or framework to support schools.
- Don't limit the list of interventions to only those categories in the accountability system (reading, math, graduation rate, English proficiency, and school quality and success indicator); also include interventions that would be desired based on a school needs assessment such as school culture and climate, behavior, family and community engagement, teacher professional learning, and principal leadership.
 - For example, if a school is low-performing because of reading and math performance, the accompanying interventions may not be a new reading and math program. A needs assessment may identify that the current reading and math programs being used are high-quality, but that teachers need professional development to use the materials well and that there's a poor school culture and climate, which is leading to negative attitudes among teachers and students.
- Make your list dynamic, not static. Services from curriculum and intervention providers can vary over time.
 - For example, participation in a rigorous research study could raise the stakes for a provider to deliver results, while a later rollout might not exert the same pressure. Keep your list of evidence-based programs and interventions current by requiring continued data on effectiveness from programs and regularly considering new programs or strategies, or programs or strategies that have built their evidence-base.
- Evidence-based practices should fit the population they're geared to serve. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that if an intervention was studied in an urban setting that it can't be applied to a rural setting. The local community would have to identify adaptations that would enable the intervention to fit in their context.
- How LEAs and schools use the list is perhaps the most critical contributor to making a list of evidence-based interventions lead to local improvement. If the intervention does not match root causes and/or is implemented poorly, it will not have the intended effect. For a list to be effective, it must be accompanied with support to LEAs and schools in conducting strong needs assessments and how to match interventions to those needs.

This resources draws heavily from a Results for America presentation to CCSSO's School and District Improvement (SDI) SCASS on October 28, 2016 and the U.S. Department of Education's non-regulatory guidance on evidence-based practice. Please contact Carrie Heath Phillips, Program Director for School Improvement at CCSSO, at carrie.phillips@ccsso.org with any comments or questions. For additional resources, please visit www.ccsso.org/ESSA and Results for America's evidence hub at <http://results4america.org/ed-lab-resources/>.