**Researching and Selecting Evidence-Based Practices and Programs**

Applying this Knowledge in the Planning Process

**Why This Step is Important:** Creating an effective school or district plan requires that educators engage in three distinct areas of work over the course of the planning process in order to identify the right strategy and build the best plan for improvement. These three areas of inquiry are:

1. Analyzing the district’s current state and root causes of performance, in order to understand why the district is where it is today;
2. Envisioning the future of the district, in order to identify where the community wants to go on behalf of its students; and
3. Researching practices that have proven effective, in order to look outside the district and learn from and apply others’ success.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) approved by Congress in 2015 promotes the use of evidence-based programs and practices by schools and districts as part of the continuous improvement process. (See the U.S. Department of Education’s [guidance](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceuseseinvestment.pdf) for more details.) Thanks to this ESSA focus, an increasing number of resources are now readily available for educators’ use in this step of the planning process.

As areas of potential focus begin to emerge through root cause analysis and/or community envisioning of the future, members of the district leadership team will want to access some of the resources below in order to learn more about effective programs in these areas.

**Searching Clearinghouses for Evidence-Based Practices:** This section includes a list of four clearinghouses currently available for educators’ use in researching effective, evidence-based practices.

**1. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)**

<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Produced by the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Covers a wide range of education interventions and practices from pre-K through postsecondary. Their [practice guides](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuides) are particularly helpful because they present research-based recommendations on specific challenges districts face, such as preventing dropout and building foundational reading skills.

**2. Evidence for ESSA**

<https://www.evidenceforessa.org/>

Produced by the Center for Research and Reform in Education (CRRE) at Johns Hopkins University School of Education. Focused on K–12 reading and mathematics interventions.

**3. Best Evidence Encyclopedia**

<http://www.bestevidence.org/>

Produced by the Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University School of Education. Covers reading, mathematics, science, comprehensive school reform, and early childhood interventions.

**4. Results First Clearinghouse Database**

<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2014/09/results-first-clearinghouse-database>

Produced by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Covers education, child welfare, juvenile and criminal justice, health, and other social programs.

**Evaluating and Selecting Evidence-Based Interventions:** The U.S. Department of Education’s [guidance](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceuseseinvestment.pdf) provides a useful set of questions districts should consider about research evidence and local capacity when determining which interventions to select. An adapted list of these questions follows.

*About using evidence:*

* What do the majority of studies on this intervention find? Does the intervention have positive and statistically significant effects on important student (or other relevant) outcomes across many studies? Do any studies have null, negative, or not statistically significant findings?
* How rigorous are the study designs in terms of the strength of the claim that the intervention caused the outcome obtained, rather than just being correlated with it? Do any meet the criteria for strong or moderate evidence, as defined in ESSA?[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Was the intervention implemented in contexts similar to your own? (e.g., similar enrollment size, geography (rural or urban), governance structures, relevant legal or regulatory requirements)
* Was the intervention implemented among students similar to those you aim to serve? (e.g., English language learners, students more than one year behind in mathematics)
* How can we monitor implementation along the way? How would we measure success?

*About local capacity:*

* What resources are required to implement this intervention?
* Will the potential impact of this intervention justify the costs, or are there more cost-effective interventions that will accomplish the same outcomes?
* What is the local capacity to implement this intervention? Are there available funds? Do staff have the needed skills? Is there buy-in for the intervention?
* How does this intervention fit into larger strategic goals and other existing efforts?
* How will this intervention be sustained over time?

1. See the U.S. Department of Education’s guidance, Using Evidence to Strengthen Educational Investments, for more details on these criteria. https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceuseseinvestment.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)