**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 areas of work over the course of the planning process in order to identify the right strategies and build the best plan for improvement. These three areas of inquiry are:

1. Analyzing the current state and root causes of performance, in order to understand why the district or school is where it is today;
2. Envisioning the future of the district or school, 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 or school and learn from and apply others’ success.

In an effort to assist schools and districts in more easily locating evidence-based programs and practices, DESE has created the [How Do We Know?](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/howdoweknow/) initiative, a web site that supports, among other things, locating, evaluating, and selecting evidence-based practices. As areas of potential focus begin to emerge through root cause analysis and/or community envisioning of the future, members of the leadership team will want to access some of the resources below in order to learn more about effective programs in the areas they identify as priorities.

**Searching for Evidence-Based Practices:** This section includes a list of three resources currently available on the [How Do We Know?](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/howdoweknow/) web site for educators’ use in researching effective, evidence-based practices.

* + [*School improvement practices in Massachusetts*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/howdoweknow/schoolimprove.html)*:* This section of the web site links to research and resources on school improvement conducted by third-party researchers contracted by DESE beginning in 2012. The materials produced through this research are relevant for any school or district engaged in school improvement efforts, not just schools or districts requiring assistance or intervention as defined by DESE’s new ESSA accountability plan. In particular, districts will find the Implementation Study, the Turnaround Practices Field Guide, and the Turnaround Video series to be useful in thinking about effective school improvements. All of the turnaround materials are located on DESE's [Turnaround Practices Research and Evaluation Reports](http://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/howitworks/reports.html) page.
  + [*Research summaries, literature reviews, and policy briefs*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/howdoweknow/researchpolicy.html)*:* This section includes links to summaries of research, literature reviews, and policy briefs organized by DESE's goal and strategies. The purpose of this section is to provide as many publicly available resources as possible that summarize the known research base in these areas. Reviewing the documents associated with these links may prevent you from having to review the evidence base on your own.
  + [*Clearinghouses of individual studies*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/howdoweknow/clearinghouses.html)*:* This section includes links to the many clearinghouses available for researching effective, evidence-based practices. These clearinghouses in turn provide links to additional resources such as research studies, practice guides, and reviews of evidence-based curriculum.

**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)