

ESSA Tiers of Evidence

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

This handout accompanies the REL Midwest video *Understanding the ESSA tiers of evidence*.

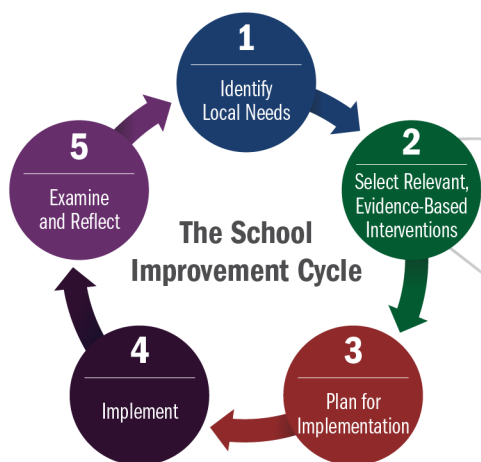


VISIT REL MIDWEST'S WEBSITE to watch our video on the ESSA tiers of evidence and to learn how we are partnering with stakeholders across the region to encourage the utilization of evidence in policy planning and practice.



Scan QR code

THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA), the 2015 national education law that replaced No Child Left Behind, is focused on state and district decisionmaking. The law encourages state and local education agencies to utilize the school improvement cycle, moving from identifying needs to choosing and implementing interventions to examining the outcomes.



Under the ESSA, districts and schools have flexibility to choose interventions to improve student outcomes. District and school leaders are encouraged to choose evidence-based interventions that have been shown to improve student outcomes. By selecting interventions that have been rigorously studied and have improved student learning, district and school leaders increase the likelihood that student achievement will improve.

THE ESSA TIERS OF EVIDENCE provide districts and schools with a framework for determining which programs, practices, strategies, and interventions work in which contexts and for which students.

DETERMINING TIERS OF EVIDENCE

Five factors determine an intervention's evidence rating: study design, results of a study, findings from related studies, sample size and setting, and how the students and setting in the study overlap with those in the district or school considering the intervention.

Tiers of evidence are determined by the following five factors:



Study Design



Results of the Study



Findings From
Related Studies



Sample Size & Setting



Match

The effect of a program on student outcomes can be studied several ways. Under ESSA, how a program is studied determines the evidence tier. Programs need to be studied in a systematic way and have a suitable sample size. Additionally, the study must find that students who receive the intervention have better outcomes than students who do not receive the intervention, and similar studies must have similar results.

Keep in mind, evidence tier ratings are not static. As new evidence on a program's impacts becomes available, the rating can change.

UNDERSTANDING THE ESSA TIERS OF EVIDENCE



**Strong
Evidence**



**Moderate
Evidence**



**Promising
Evidence**



**Demonstrates
a Rationale**

 Study Design	Well-designed and implemented experimental study, meets WWC standards without reservations	Well-designed and implemented quasi-experimental study, meets WWC standards with reservations	Well-designed and implemented correlational study, statistically controls for selection bias ^a	Well-defined logic model based on rigorous research
 Results of the Study	Statistically significant positive effect on a relevant outcome	Statistically significant positive effect on a relevant outcome	Statistically significant positive effect on a relevant outcome	An effort to study the effects of the intervention is planned or currently under way
 Findings From Related Studies	No strong negative findings from experimental or quasi-experimental studies	No strong negative findings from experimental or quasi-experimental studies	No strong negative findings from experimental or quasi-experimental studies	N/A
 Sample Size & Setting	At least 350 participants, conducted in more than one district or school	At least 350 participants, conducted in more than one district or school	N/A	N/A
 Match	Similar population <i>and</i> setting to your setting	Similar population <i>or</i> setting to your setting	N/A	N/A

a. Findings from experimental and quasi-experimental studies that either (a) meet the first three criteria for Tiers 1 and 2 but not the sample size, setting, or match requirements, or (b) do not meet WWC standards but statistically control for selection bias between the treatment and comparison groups are also eligible to meet Tier 3 Promising Evidence.

TIER 4 ENCOURAGES INNOVATION and new research on promising practices. A Tier 4 intervention must have a well-specified logic model that is based on rigorous research. In addition, an effort to study the effects of the program must already be planned or under way. Check with your state about its policies on Tier 4 evidence.

WHAT CAN YOU DO NEXT?

- Parents can engage with other parents through their school-parent organizations and be informed on the programs in place in their schools.
- Teachers can engage with other teachers in the school to identify which programs are effective and report back to their administrators.
- District and school administrators can read their state's ESSA plan for their specific guidance on district accountability expectations and ask for support with identifying programs that meet the standards.

LOOKING FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS?

Check out the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) at whatworks.ed.gov and watch a video on using WWC to identify ESSA evidence ratings available on [YouTube](#).