



A Guide to Choosing Programs, Policies or Practices

Investing in Evidence

The federal government and state agencies place a stronger emphasis on the use of evidence-based policies, practices and programs, as these interventions have been proven to lead to stronger student outcomes.

Looking for an evidence-based program?

Every *Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) recognizes four levels of evidence. The top three levels require findings of a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes.

- **Strong Evidence:** At least one well-designed and well-implemented *experimental* (i.e., randomized) study.
- **Moderate Evidence:** At least one well-designed and well-implemented *quasi-experimental* (i.e., matched) study.
- **Promising Evidence:** At least one well-designed and well-implemented *correlational* study with statistical controls for selection bias.

The fourth level is a program or practice that does not yet have evidence qualifying for the top 3 levels and can be considered *evidence-building and under evaluation*.¹

ESSA Tiers of Evidence aligning with other National Evidence-based database standards

	ESSA	Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development	What works Clearinghouse WWC	Crime Solutions
Meets ESSA criteria for Evidence-based	 Strong Evidence	Model Plus	Positive 	Effective 
	 Moderate Evidence	Model	Potentially Positive 	
	 Promising Evidence	Promising		Promising 
Does not meet ESSA criteria for Evidence-based	 Demonstrates a Rationale	Non-certified Programs: Ineffective, harmful, inconclusive evidence or insufficient evidence.	Mixed 	No effects 
	No evidence or negative effects		No Discernible  Potentially Negative  Negative 	

How do I match programs that have been shown to be effective with students like mine and based on my needs? Programs are designed and implemented based on population, race and settings. Matching your specific setting, target population and desired outcomes is critical to the fidelity and success of the program as designed, tested and evaluated. Many of the searchable databases offer the ability to select criteria to align with your school's specific needs.

¹ Center for Research and Reform in Education, John Hopkins University (2020) <https://www.evidenceforessa.org/page/frequently-asked-questions>

Why I didn't see a program I know about in my search?

Often, schools receive a solicitation from a vendor or sometimes a referral for a program from a neighboring school district. You may receive a link to a website that states the program is evidence-based and offers testimonials. Some of these programs have **not** submitted the program for evaluation of effectiveness and are considered “*Innovative*” programs. Ask a vendor for a logic model, peer-review studies or an evaluation by a research organization/federal agency. Most programs implemented in communities to improve youths' lives, unfortunately, do not produce the hoped-for effects when rigorously evaluated, or cost more to implement than they produce in benefits. Interventions with the strongest scientific support are considered evidence-based.²

What does it mean to be evidence-based?

To be *evidence-based* there must be a scientific evaluation, approval and endorsement verifying the study's design, results of the study, sampling size and setting are proven to change a selected targeted outcome.

Evidence ratings are not static, research organizations are constantly evaluating programming impacts. It is important to check your current programs to verify their level of evidence. New programs are submitted and evaluated against the various proven standards of effectiveness, so make time to check for new information.

Looking for additional information?

[OPI Evidence-based Resources](#)

[Evidence-based Benefit Cost Results](#) by Washington State Institute for Public Policy for a Cost benefit

² University of Colorado Boulder, Institute of Behavioral Science, Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development (2020)
<https://www.blueprintsprograms.org/faq/>