

ESSA Tiers of Evidence

Background

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) consistently directed educators to implement programming and interventions grounded in research. This has been replaced by “evidence-based interventions” under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This shift was designed to help increase the impact of educational investments by ensuring that interventions being implemented have proven to be effective in leading to desired outcomes, namely improving student achievement.

Under ESEA § 8102(21)(B), the term evidence-based, when used with respect to a State, local educational agency (LEA), or school activity, means an activity, strategy, or intervention that is supported by one of the following: strong evidence, moderate evidence, promising evidence, or evidence that demonstrates a rationale. ESSA entrusts the responsibility for states and LEAs to select appropriate and relevant supports with the strongest evidence base possible to ensure student achievement and growth.

The Evidence Provisions of ESSA

Federal Program	Evidence Required
Title I, § 1003: School Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum of one intervention must meet Tiers I, II, or III in Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) schools
Title I, Part A: Basic Programs for Schoolwide and Targeted Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All four levels (Tiers I, II, III, IV) of the evidence-based definition apply, where evidence is reasonably available External providers must have expertise in using evidence-based practices.
Title II: Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High-Quality Teachers, Principals, and Other School Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All four levels (Tiers I, II, III, IV) of the evidence-based definition apply, where evidence is reasonably available
Title III: Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All four levels (Tiers I, II, III, IV) of the evidence-based definition apply, where evidence is reasonably available
Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All four levels (Tiers I, II, III, IV) of the evidence-based definition apply, where evidence is reasonably available
Title V, Part B: Rural Education Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All four levels (Tiers I, II, III, IV) of the evidence-based definition apply, where evidence is reasonably available

Tiers of Evidence

Strong Evidence—Tier 1

To qualify under Tier 1, there must be at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study that has a significant favorable effect on relevant outcome. Note the U.S. Department of Education (ED) considers a study well-designed and well-implemented only if it meets [What Works Clearinghouse](#) (WWC) Evidence Standards without reservations. In addition,

1. The effect of the intervention on a student outcome or other relevant outcome must be positive and significant.
2. There may not be any unfavorable evidence with the same intervention that meet WWC Evidence Standards with or without reservations or are the equivalent quality for making causal inference.
3. The study must have a large **and** multi-site sample.
 - As defined by EDGAR Part 77.1, a large sample means 350 or more students (or other single analysis units), or 50 or more groups (such as classrooms or schools) that contain 10 or more students (or other single analysis units).
 - A multi-site sample as defined by EDGAR Part 77.1, means that it consists of more than one site, where site can be defined as an LEA, locality, or State.
 - As EDGAR states, multiple studies can cumulatively meet the large sample requirement and the multi-site sample requirement, if each study meets the other requirements corresponding with the specific level of evidence.
4. The study's sample must contain populations and settings that overlap or align with LEA/school populations and settings, such as rural or urban.

Moderate Evidence— Tier 2

To qualify under Tier 2, there must be at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study. According to EDGAR Part 77.1, a quasi-experimental study means a study using a design that attempts to approximate an experimental design by identifying a comparison group that is similar to the treatment group in important respects. In addition:

1. The effect of the intervention on a student outcome or other relevant outcome must be positive and significant.
2. There may not be any unfavorable evidence with the same intervention that meet WWC Evidence Standards with or without reservations or are the equivalent quality for making causal inference.
3. The study must have a large **and** multi-site sample.
 - As defined by EDGAR Part 77.1, a large sample means 350 or more students (or other single analysis units), or 50 or more groups (such as classrooms or schools) that contain 10 or more students (or other single analysis units).
 - A multi-site sample as defined by EDGAR Part 77.1, means that it consists of more than one site, where site can be defined as an LEA, locality, or State.
 - As EDGAR states, multiple studies can cumulatively meet the large sample requirement and the multi-site sample requirement, if each study meets the other requirements corresponding with the specific level of evidence.
4. The study's sample must contain populations and settings that overlap or align with LEA/school populations and settings, such as rural or urban.

Promising Evidence—Tier 3

To qualify for Tier 3, there must be at least one well-designed and well-implemented study. In addition:

1. The study must have a statistically significant favorable effect with the outcome.
2. There cannot be any overriding negative effects from the study.

Evidence that Demonstrates a Rationale—Tier 4

To qualify for Tier 4, the LEA/school must be able to demonstrate a rationale, including the following:

1. There must be a well-specified logic model where the outcome is likely to improve relevant outcomes.
 - According to EDGAR Part 77.1, a logic model means a well-specified conceptual framework that identifies key components of the proposed process, product, strategy, or practice and describes the relationships among the key components and outcomes, theoretically and operationally.
2. That the effort to study the effects is either currently, or will be, under way.

Resources

- Evidence for ESSA Evidence PowerPoint and Webinar (2020): [ePlan > TDOE Resources](#) > ESSA Information, Guidance, PPTs, & Webinars > Evidence for ESSA
 - [Focus on ESSA Evidence PowerPoint](#)
 - [Focus on ESSA Evidence Webinar Recording](#)
- [What Works Clearinghouse](#) (WWC): The WWC is an investment of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within ED. The WWC reviews the existing research on different programs, products, practices, and policies in education.
 - [Using The WWC To Find ESSA Tiers Of Evidence](#)
 - [Educator Practice Guides](#): A publication that presents recommendations for educators to address challenges in their classrooms and schools.
 - [Video: Understanding the Department of Education’s Evidence Definitions](#)
 - [What Defines a Quasi-Experimental Study?](#)
- [Regional Educational Laboratory \(REL\) Program Midwest](#): REL Midwest works to bridge the worlds of education research and education practice.
 - [Tiers of Evidence](#)
- [Effective Practices: Research Briefs and Evidence Rating](#)
- [Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments](#)