

Comparison of ESSA’s Evidence Levels to the What Works Clearinghouse Ratings

Updated [Non-Regulatory Guidance](#) states that organizations should select evidence-based project components from resources provided through the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) when utilizing federal funds. When evaluating evidence to support implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) located on the WWC website, you might notice that the WWC provides ratings, as well as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) evidence levels for each resource. The ESSA evidence levels and the WWC ratings are based on different factors and criteria, but both provide beneficial information. This resource explains the difference.

The Every Student Succeeds Act Evidence Levels

ESSA aims to fully prepare all students for success in college and careers. ESSA evidence levels provide districts and schools with a framework for determining which programs, practices, strategies and interventions work in which contexts and for which students.

Five factors determine an intervention’s ESSA evidence level:

- Study design
- Results of a study
- Findings from related studies
- Sample size and setting
- How the students and setting in the study overlap with those in the district or school considering the intervention

ESSA Evidence Levels
Level 1/Strong Evidence: Well-designed and implemented experimental study, meets WWC standards without reservations. Statistically significant positive effect on the outcome. At least 350 participants, conducted in more than one district or school.
Level 2/Moderate Evidence: Well-designed and implemented quasi-experimental study, meets WWC standards with or without reservations. Statistically significant positive effect on a relevant outcome. At least 350 participants, conducted in more than one district or school.
Level 3/Promising Evidence: Well-designed and implemented correlational study, statistical controls for selection bias. Statistically significant positive effect on a relevant outcome.
Level 4/Demonstrates a Rationale: Well-defined logic model based on rigorous research. An effort to study the effects on the intervention is planned or currently underway.

What Works Clearinghouse Resources

The What Works Clearinghouse is an online database that collects, screens and identifies studies on the effectiveness of educational programs, products, practices and policies. The WWC is an initiative of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education and was established in 2002. The level of evidence for practice guides is based on the following:

- The number of studies supporting the recommended practices
- Whether the recommended practices were directly tested in the studies or tested in combination with other practices
- Whether the recommended practices consistently led to improved outcomes within and across studies
- Whether the studies capture a diverse range of students and contexts

Practice Guides¹ Ratings
Strong Evidence: There is consistent evidence that meets WWC standards and indicates that the practices improve student outcomes for a diverse population of students.
Moderate Evidence: There is some evidence meeting WWC standards that the practices improve student outcomes, but there may be ambiguity about whether that improvement is the direct result of the practices or whether the findings can be replicated with a diverse population of students.
Minimal Evidence: Evidence may not meet standards or may exhibit inconsistencies, but the panel determined that the recommendation must be included because the intervention is based on strong theory, is new and has not yet been studied, or is difficult to study with a rigorous research design.

¹ WWC-created practice guides are publications that presents recommendations for educators to address challenges in their classrooms and schools.

Intervention report rating depends on:

- The number of studies that meet WWC standards
- The sign and statistical significance of the average effect across these studies
- The effect to which findings in the outcome domain meet WWC standards with or without reservations

Intervention Reports² Ratings
Positive effects: Evidence across multiple studies that the intervention had a positive effect on outcomes.
Potentially positive effects: Some evidence that the intervention had a positive effect on outcomes, but evidence is not as strong.
Uncertain effects (previously mixed or no discernible effects): No discernible evidence that the intervention had either a positive or negative effect on outcomes.
Potentially negative effects: Some evidence that the intervention had a negative effect on outcomes, but evidence is not as strong.
Negative effects: Evidence across multiple studies that the intervention had a negative effect on outcomes.

² WWC-created intervention reports provide a summary of findings of the highest-quality research on a program, practice or policy in education.



Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices

Released: August 2008

Full Guide (1.2 MB)



Recommendations

Details

Panel

This guide presents strategies that classroom teachers and specialists can use to increase the reading ability of adolescent students. The recommendations aim to help students gain more from their reading tasks, improve their motivation for and engagement in the learning process, and assist struggling readers who may need intensive and individualized attention.

<p>1 Provide explicit vocabulary instruction.</p> <p>▼ Show More</p>	<p>STRONG EVIDENCE</p>	<p>TIER 3 PROMISING</p>
<p>2 Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction.</p> <p>▼ Show More</p>	<p>STRONG EVIDENCE</p>	<p>TIER 3 PROMISING</p>
<p>3 Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation.</p> <p>▼ Show More</p>	<p>MODERATE EVIDENCE</p>	<p>TIER 3 PROMISING</p>
<p>4 Increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning.</p> <p>▼ Show More</p>	<p>MODERATE EVIDENCE</p>	<p>TIER 3 PROMISING</p>
<p>5 Make available intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by trained specialists.</p> <p>▼ Show More</p>	<p>STRONG EVIDENCE</p>	<p>TIER 3 PROMISING</p>

- In the example above, notice that the WWC rated the first two recommendations as strong evidence to support student achievement. However, ESSA considers the same recommendations Tier/Level 3. Although they differ, both meet requirements for federal funds.
- ESSA Levels 1-3 can support federally funded school improvement programming.
- WWC evidence rated Strong and Moderate can support federally funded school improvement programming.