



Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated: March 2020

1. How is evidence-based defined?

Evidence-based is defined as an activity, strategy, or intervention that has been evaluated and proven to improve student outcomes. While the term *evidence-based* has been used in federal legislation before, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) is the first federal statute to provide a definition for educational purposes.

2. How does evidence-based differ from research-based?

These terms are often used interchangeably; however, they do not have the same meaning. An intervention that is evidence-based is usually research-based, but the opposite is not true 100% of the time. For an activity, strategy, or intervention to be considered evidence-based, it must have been evaluated by someone other than the organization that developed the activity, strategy, or intervention. Generally speaking there is research that goes into the development of the activity, strategy, or intervention, but any of those must be carefully evaluated through a study to determine effectiveness based on the ESSA levels.

3. What are the ESSA evidence-based levels?

ESSA divides evidence-based activities, strategies and interventions into four levels, which correspond to the rigor of the study used to assess the activity, strategy or intervention:

Level 1: Strong Evidence

Level 2: Moderate Evidence

Level 3: Promising Evidence

Level 4: Demonstrates a Rationale

More details on the requirements for each of these levels can be found in the [ESSA Evidence Level](#) document.

4. Why do the ESSA evidence levels matter?

The ESSA evidence levels provide schools and districts with a framework with which to evaluate potential activities, strategies or interventions. When schools base their school improvement decisions on Level 1: Strong Evidence, they can be confident that the evidence-based practice will likely produce the desired result – if implemented with fidelity.

It is also important to evaluate the evidence levels for desired interventions because certain federal funding sources (i.e. school improvement funds, Title I, Part A, and others) will require the documentation of evidence at different levels.

5. How do evidence-based practices fit into our school or district improvement plans?

Schools who are identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) will be required to identify evidence-based interventions in their turnaround plan. Schools identified as Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) will be required to identify evidence-based interventions in their Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP).

6. How do local characteristics and needs factor into the levels of evidence?

It is very important for schools and districts to consider local characteristics and needs into the selection of evidence-based interventions. While an intervention may have been proven to be effective with a general population, that doesn't necessarily mean that the intervention will be effective for that particular school's population. In order to achieve the highest level of evidence, a study must reflect both the setting and the population of the school in which the intervention will be conducted. If an experimental or quasi-experimental study does not reflect the setting or population of the school, the highest level it can receive is Level 4: Demonstrates a Rationale.

7. What happens if my school cannot find evidence for a strategy, activity, or intervention that we intend to use? Does that mean we cannot use it?

It is very unlikely that no evidence exists for a given strategy, activity, or intervention. However, if your school is unable to find evidence to support the strategy, activity, or intervention that has been working for you, a clearly defined logic model may be developed and studied at your site.

8. Do we have to purchase an intervention that has already been vetted by a third party?

No. ESSA's evidence provisions do not require schools or districts to use off-the-shelf interventions or strategies. While many resources exist to help you vet off-the-shelf interventions, your school may select any strategy, activity, or intervention vetted through rigorous evaluation.

9. How many studies have to be conducted to support the use of an intervention before it is considered evidence-based?

ESSA's evidence based provision specifies that one study must demonstrate a statistically significant impact on the performance outcome for the intervention to be evidence-based. While it only takes one study to qualify as evidence-based, that study should not be overridden by a more rigorous or more comprehensive study. Decision makers are

encouraged to review the full body of literature around a study before making the decision to implement.

10. What is the difference between an experimental study, a quasi-experimental study, and a correlational study?

The three terms identified above each reflect a wide range of study designs or protocols. For a more detailed explanation, please consult the [Evidence-Based Practices Glossary](#).

11. What evidence-based resources are available to schools and districts?

Please review the [ESSA Evidence Resources: Clearinghouses and Databases](#) document for more information.

12. How should evidence be documented?

Evidence-based practices can be documented in the “Activities” section of the CSIP Goal Builder template with more detailed documentation uploaded to the CSIP as an attachment. Schools may use the [Empowered by Evidence: Reviewing Evidence Under ESSA](#) document, a brief narrative, or a locally derived option to provide additional details.

13. Are schools allowed to cite vendor-produced research for evidence-based practices?

While the best practice is to use research that is independently funded and conducted, vendor produced research is allowable under ESSA. Schools are encouraged to carefully vet vendor produced research for signs of bias.

14. How does KDE support schools and districts in the implementation of evidence-based practices?

KDE had deployed an evidence-informed model for supporting schools and districts in the implementation of ESSA’s EBP requirements. The logic model has been documented in the paper [Education Agencies as Research Intermediaries](#).

15. Will KDE be providing a list of evidence-based practices?

Due to the diversity of the state and the importance of local context when selecting evidence-based practices, KDE will not be providing a list of evidence-based practices. It may be appropriate for districts or localities to create databases for internal use.

16. Where should schools look if they cannot find evidence to support practice?

In alignment with the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) procedures handbook, schools should begin their search for evidence at the [Education Resource Information Center \(ERIC\)](#). Schools are not limited to any one set of databases when seeking evidence. If a school is struggling to find evidence to support a product, KDE encourages schools to contact the

vendor directly for support. If a school is seeking evidence for a specific teaching practice, the resources provided by the [Kentucky Virtual Library](#) may be helpful.

17. If a school wants to use multiple practices to meet an objective, does each practice need to be evidence-based?

For compliance purposes, evidence is only required for the key activities – if a school has multiple activities for a single objective, evidence will only be required for the primary activity. Schools should be careful to review any grant guidance provided by the program coordinator to ensure compliance with special programs.

18. Do we have to stop using a practice that is not evidence-based?

Schools are not required to discard established practices or products, however, schools are encouraged to evaluate the local effectiveness of a practice or product before continuing its use.

19. Do meta-analysis meet ESSA's requirements?

Meta-analytic studies are not specifically mentioned in the ESSA; however, KDE has determined that they do meet ESSA's evidence-based practices requirements. You can learn more about our rationale for this decision and how to interpret the results of a meta-analysis by accessing the document [Empowered by Scholarly Literature: Evaluating Meta-Analyses](#).

20. Can we use single case studies to inform our work?

With the release of the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Standard Handbook v. 4.1, single case research can meet the WWC standards, and therefore the ESSA standards, under certain circumstances. For more detailed information about the role single case studies play in evaluating evidence-based practices, please see the [What Works Clearinghouse Standards Handbook](#).

21. Can schools cite master's theses or doctoral dissertations?

Yes. Well-designed master's theses or doctoral dissertations can be used to inform evidence-based decisions in schools and districts assuming that they meet the other requirements spelled out in the [ESSA Evidence Levels](#) document.