Selecting Evidence-Based Programs and Practices for Title IV, Part A Activities

The purpose of this resource guide on selecting evidence-based programs (EBPs) is to inform state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) of the requirements outlined as part of the Title IV, Part A statute, and to provide a starting point for identifying and selecting interventions, curricula, and other resources with a credible research base.

What Is an Evidence-Based Program/Practice (EBP)?

Section 8101(21)(A) of the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) defines an **evidence-based intervention** (i.e., an activity or strategy) as meeting one of four levels of evidence: strong, moderate, promising, or demonstration of a rationale. These are further defined in the U.S. Department of Education (ED)-published Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments (2016). The first three levels of evidence require that the program or practice has been evaluated (whether through an experimental, quasi-experimental, or correlational study) and that the program is associated with a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes, as follows:

- strong evidence: "at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study";
- moderate evidence: "at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study"; and
- promising evidence: "at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias."

The final level of evidence noted in the guidance ("demonstrates a rationale") is "based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention."

This means that although a program or practice does not have any direct evaluations, the logic model or theory of change supporting the program is supported by research linking program activities to the desired outcomes.
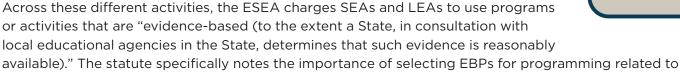
What Is the Title IV, Part A Statutory Language Around EBPs?

Subpart 1 of Title IV, Part A (https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/legislation/title-iv.html) of the ESEA specifically mentions evidence-based programming in the following sections:

- Sec. 4102 DEFINITIONS, subsection (5)(A) DRUG AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION;
- Sec. 4104 STATE USE OF FUNDS, subsections (b)(3)(B)(ii and iii) and (C)(iii):
  - (B) "foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement"; and
  - (C) "increase access to personalized, rigorous learning experiences supported by technology"; and
- Sec. 4108 ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT SAFE AND HEALTHY STUDENTS, subsections (a)(5)(A), (B), and (F).

Across each section, the statute allows SEAs and LEAs that receive Title IV, Part A funds to use those funds for activities that may include

- training or building awareness of school personnel;
- educating and supporting students; or
- developing and engaging community-based partnerships.

Across these different activities, the ESEA charges SEAs and LEAs to use programs or activities that are "evidence-based (to the extent a State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available)." The statute specifically notes the importance of selecting EBPs for programming related to

- promoting health and safety [Sec. 4104 (b)(3)(B)(iii)];
- preventing drug use and violence [Sec. 4108 (5)(A)];
- developing mental health training, supports, and partnerships [Sec. 4104 (b)(3)(B)(ii)];
- offering rigorous learning experiences supported by technology [Sec. 4104 (b)(3)(C)(iii)]; and
- designing and implementing a locally tailored plan to reduce exclusionary discipline practices in elementary and secondary schools [Sec. 4108 (5)(F)].

How Do I Select an EBP to Match My Needs?

The first step in selecting an EBP is to explore the available research on your identified topic or need to ensure that the program has sufficient evidence and that it is appropriate for your needs. There are many resources available to help educators both understand the **process of selecting EBPs** and identify existing programs that already have an **established evidence base** for specific outcomes.

PROCESS FOR SELECTING EBPS

The following resources can help SEA and LEA staff learn about the process for selecting and implementing EBPs appropriate for their identified needs.

Table 1. Resources about selecting and implementing EBPs

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
Understanding Evidence Part 1: Best Available Research Evidence. A Guide to the Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness	This Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) resource explains the meaning of a "Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness" (see also Exhibit 1 below) and provides common language for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in discussing evidence-based decision making.
Selecting Evidence-Based Programs	This resource from the National Resource Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention offers a four-part framework for selecting EBPs: (a) identifying the intended population, (b) verifying the intervention target (i.e., what is the intervention designed to address?), (c) determining the baseline severity of existing risks and problems, and (d) confirming the intervention delivery plan.
Using Evidence-based Programs	This Web page from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services outlines key considerations and guidance on finding, selecting, implementing, adapting, and replicating EBPs.
A Framework for Effectively Implementing Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (EBPs)	This resource reviews a three-stage action framework: (1) Selection, (2) Preparation; and (3) Implementation. The goal of this resource is to maximize the likelihood that the EBP implementation will be successful and result in the desired outcomes.
Society for Prevention Research (SPR) Standards of Evidence	This research article discusses and reconciles different standards for what is considered to be necessary to demonstrate effectiveness.

Many programs and activities have minimal research evidence, or the available research may not be related to your desired outcomes. Exhibit 1 below, excerpted from the CDC resource noted in Table 1 above, can help you understand where a program falls on a continuum of evidence. The CDC report notes that both the strength of the **evidence** (i.e., what does research say?) and the **effectiveness** (i.e., what outcomes does it produce?) must be considered (Puddy & Wilkins, 2011; see also Gottfredson et al., 2015[1]).

Exhibit 1. "Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness"

Source: Excerpted in whole from Puddy, R. W., & Wilkins, N. (2011). Understanding Evidence Part 1: Best Available Research Evidence. A Guide to the Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, p. 8. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/Understanding_Evidence-a.pdf.

---

[1] Gottfredson, D. C., Cook, T. D., Gardner, F. E., Gorman-Smith, D., Howe, G. W., Sandler, I. N., & Zafft, K. M. (2015). Standards of evidence for efficacy, effectiveness, and scale-up research in prevention science: Next generation. Prevention science, 16(7), 893-926. Retrieved from https://www.preventionresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Standards-of-Evidence_2015.pdf.

Finding Established EBPs

The following registries provide lists of programs that are identified as evidence based for different purposes. Registries provide lists of programs and categorizes them (e.g., by subject, rigor, and target audience). It is important to note that each registry uses slightly different definitions of evidence. Therefore, databases should be used as a resource, but you should take care to ensure that the programs identified on databases have sufficient evidence for your needs.

Table 2. EBP Directories

RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)	This resource sponsored by ED's Institute of Education Sciences reviews the existing research on different programs, products, practices, and policies in education.
CrimeSolutions.gov	This database from the U.S. Department of Justice provides information on programs designed to address risk and protective factors related to crime. These include programs designed to address bullying, drug and substance use, truancy, and other behaviors. The database provides information on both programs that are effective and programs that have resulted in no effects on targeted outcomes.
Youth.gov Evidence-Based-Program-Directories	This resource, co-sponsored by multiple Federal agencies, lists 18 EBP directories (including WWC and CrimeSolutions.gov). The information in each registry allows users to identify programs that best meet their needs and are supported by a body of research. Registries vary in the programs they include, how they define evidence, the depth of evidence they require, the criteria they use for classifying EBPs, and their area of focus.
Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development (BHYD)	Sponsored by a project within the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado Boulder, BHYD highlights youth programs with the highest level of evidence and rigor. BHYD allows users to search by targeted outcomes, populations, and level of evidence.

Considerations for Using EBP Registries

It is important to understand that programs listed in registries are not exhaustive, as there are many programs that have not been reviewed and listed in a registry. Furthermore, programs listed on registries may not have research about outcomes that meet your specific needs or special populations. Additional research on different approaches, programs, and applicability may exist. As noted above, ESEA asks that SEAs and LEAs use programs that are "evidence-based (to the extent a State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available)."

For help examining the merits of interventions not listed on an EBP registry or for which research is not generalizable to your specific needs, Title IV, Part A grantees at the SEA level can work with the T4PA Center (info@t4pacenter.org) and their Title IV, Part A Federal Project Officers; LEAs can work with their Title IV, Part A state coordinators and state-level technical assistance teams.