The Evidence Provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

A key aspect of ESSA is its commitment to the use of evidence to drive better outcomes for students. Implemented well, the evidence-based provisions can both improve student outcomes and increase the return on education investments, as more resources are spent on programs and practices likely to have a positive impact. This document provides a high-level summary of the various provisions (below) and an explanation of ESSA's definition of "evidence-based" (page 2).
Definition of "Evidence-Based" in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

ESSA's definition of "evidence-based" includes 4 levels of evidence. The top 3 levels require findings of a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on:

1. **Strong**
   - At least 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study (i.e., randomized)

2. **Moderate**
   - At least 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study (i.e., matched)

3. **Promising**
   - At least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias

The 4th level is designed for ideas that do not yet have an evidence base qualifying for the top 3 levels above. Given the requirement in the second bullet below to examine the effects of these ideas, this evidence-building level can be referred to as "under evaluation."

- **(4) "Under Evaluation"**
  - Demonstrates rationale based on high-quality research or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes
  - Includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention

Required for school improvement plans funded by 7% set aside (Section 1003) & Eligible for a priority under 7 competitive grants

Included for all other uses of "evidence-based"