



777 6th Street NW
 Suite 500
 Washington DC 20001
 tel (202) 618-3900
 fax (202) 478-1804
www.pennhillgroup.com



MEMORANDUM

TO: CCSSO
 FROM: Penn Hill Group
 DATE: March 11, 2016
 SUBJECT: Evidence-based and its use in ESEA

The memorandum summarizes and analyzes how the definition of the term “evidence-based” is used in the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization).

Definition of Evidence-Based

ESSA includes a definition of “evidence-based” in the general provisions title of the bill (Title VIII). This placement applies this definition to the term wherever it is used in the Act. The term is defined as:

EVIDENCE-BASED.— (A) **IN GENERAL.**—Except as provided in subparagraph (B), the term ‘evidence-based’, when used with respect to a State, local educational agency, or school activity, means an activity, strategy, or intervention that—

- (i) demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on—
 - (I) strong evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;
 - (II) moderate evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or
 - (III) promising evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
- (ii)(I) demonstrates a rationale 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
 - (II) includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.

(B) DEFINITION FOR SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES FUNDED UNDER THIS ACT.—When used with respect to interventions or improvement activities or strategies funded under section 1003, the term ‘evidence-based’ means a State, local educational agency, or school activity, strategy, or intervention that meets the requirements of subclause (I), (II), or (III) of subparagraph (A)(i).

Analysis of Definition

The definition establishes two methods for activities, strategies or interventions to be considered “evidence-based,” while requiring school improvement activities under Title I’s school improvement reservation to meet the more rigorous of the two methods. Under the first method, the activity, strategy or intervention would have to have demonstrate a statistically significant

effect on improving outcomes based on evidence from experimental or quasi-experimental studies or a correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias.

Under the second method, the chosen activity, strategy or intervention would have to have a rationale based in high quality research findings or positive evaluation that will show a likelihood of an improved student or relevant outcome.

Either of these methods can enable an activity, strategy or intervention to be deemed evidence based, except for activities funded under the school improvement reservation as described above.

Use of Definition

The term “evidence-based” appears 58 times throughout ESSA (excluding references to the term in the paragraph which defines evidence-based). This term is used to govern the use of funds and selection of activities and interventions throughout nearly all major programs of ESEA. Several areas of note that require the use of evidence-based activities and interventions include:

- Interventions in schools identified for comprehensive interventions and supports under Title I (as the bottom 5% of schools, those which are graduating less than 67% of their students and those with consistent subgroup underperformance).
- Interventions funded under the 7% Title I set aside for school improvement.
- Outside non-profit and for-profit providers helping to deliver schoolwide or targeted assistance program services under Title I (if schools chose to use such providers).
- Coursework utilized under school leader residency programs funded under Title II.
- The level of class size reduction when using funds under Title II for such purpose.
- Professional development for teachers and school leaders funded under Title II.
- Literacy activities under the Literacy for All initiative.
- Certain activities funded under by 21st Century Community Learning Center grantees.