

ESSA - The Every Student Succeeds Act

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires proof of effectiveness for products and services for schools. In order for schools to receive government funding (which pays for most education products and services) there must be evidence that the product or service "works".

All school improvement plans must include evidence-based interventions, aligned with the results of schools' needs assessments.

There are four levels of evidence under ESSA. SEG Measurement has conducted studies at all four levels, as called for by ESSA. This evidence can be used to strengthen education investments, and can typically be conducted at a reasonable cost.

A Level 1, 2 or 3 evidence-based solution is mandatory if the district would like to use Section 1003 funds to purchase an intervention. Title I parent & family engagement also requires evidence-based strategies. Several provisions in ESSA allow and encourage the use of federal funds to support STEM education.

The bottom line is that we have entered an era where some level of evidence is mandatory. Spreading the word and having visible proof -- tangible upfront evidence of academic gains and achievement -- makes it easier for your product to be selected for purchase.

How do you know the research is any good?

The educational community at large and specifically funding sources (e.g., government, foundations, ESSA) are insisting on scientifically-based research to support the products and services used in schools. But, how do you know if the research examining the product or service you are considering is any good? Ultimately, you need to rely on the review of others in the know through the peer review process. But, as with most purchasing these days, it pays to be an educated consumer. So, here are five important things to look for when reviewing effectiveness research.



Mistaking testimonials and case studies for efficacy research-

Educational publishers and technology providers often include testimonials from happy users or case studies of successful implementations, in their product literature. While feedback from colleagues who like the product and are successful is helpful, testimonials and case studies are not the same thing as scientific effectiveness research. They are based on a single point of view or instance of use, and you are likely hearing only one side of the story. Only a properly designed and carefully executed study, with a sufficiently large number of participants, comparing users of the product or service to a similar or randomly assigned group of non-users can provide you with the evidence you need to be comfortable that the product effectively achieves desired outcomes.

Research should be conducted by an independent research organization-

It is difficult to judge objectively your own work; the same is true for product and service providers. To help ensure against a confirmatory bias--the tendency to want to prove your own position--an effectiveness research study should be conducted by a third-party, credible research organization.

Inclusion of a Control Group-

Research that only reports on a group that used the product or service without reference to a comparison group who did not use the product or service is very limited. Without a comparison group, we cannot know whether any effect shown (e.g., academic growth) is really due to the use of the product or service.

Sure, the group using the product may have seen academic growth, but if the amount of growth is no greater than seen with non-users the product may not be actually contributing anything.

Inclusion of a sufficiently large and representative sample-

You want to make sure that the researchers have based their results on a sufficient number of study participants that are reasonably similar in make up to the group with whom you plan to use the product or service. It is hard to give an exact number, but small numbers of students in a limited number of classes/schools should give you pause. And, make sure that the demographic profile and other characteristics you think are important are consistent with your implementation. For example, a study conducted in an urban high school may be less applicable to a planned implementation in a suburban middle school.

Mistaking significance for magnitude-

Most of us know to look for statistically significant results--to make sure that any relationships or differences found were unlikely to occur by chance alone. That is all well and good, but it does not tell us how large the relationship or differences are. The magnitude of the relationship or differences are often reported as an effect size. Ways of reporting the effect size vary, but in most applications these effect sizes tend to be between 0 and 1, or are reported as a percentage ranging from 0 to 100. Larger values show a greater effect. But, remember: There are many influences in education and even small effects may be enough to make product purchase worthwhile.

SEG has worked with many educational publishers and technology providers, from start-ups to the largest industry players, to design & implement efficacy research programs.

With nearly 40 years of experience in research, we know what it takes to conduct sound efficacy research. Email our research experts to discuss ESSA requirements and how we can assist you with meeting the new government regulations: selliot@segmeasurement.com or call us at 800 254 7670.