EVIDENCE-BASED IMPROVEMENT

A Guide for States to Strengthen Their Frameworks and Supports Aligned to the Evidence Requirements of ESSA

TOOL 3:  
SEA GUIDANCE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Sylvie Hale   
Lenay Dunn   
Nikola Filby   
John Rice   
Lori Van Houten



## About WestEd

WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency that partners with education and other communities throughout the United States to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has more than a dozen offices nationwide, from Massachusetts, Vermont, and Georgia, to Illinois, Arizona, and California, with headquarters in San Francisco. For more information, visit <http://www.WestEd.org>.

## Disclaimer

This publication and ancillary materials were prepared in part under Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) West, at WestEd. The content of the publication and ancillary materials does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

© 2017 WestEd. All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce or adapt for non-commercial use, with attribution to WestEd, is hereby granted.

Requests for permission to reproduce any part of this report for other purposes should be directed to WestEd, 730 Harrison Street, San Francisco, CA 94107-1242, 888.293.7833, fax 415.512.2024, permissions@WestEd.org, or hhtp://www.WestEd.org/permissions.

Suggested citation: Hale, S., Dunn, L., Filby, N, Rice, J., & Van Houten, L. (2017). *Evidence-based improvement: A guide for states to strengthen their frameworks and supports aligned to the evidence requirements of ESSA—Tool 3: SEA guidance for evidence-based interventions.* San Francisco: WestEd

## Feedback

We welcome your feedback. This tool and the related guide are a first generation set of materials to help states and districts implement ESSA; we hope to revise and improve them based on use in the field. Suggestions of other resources are welcome, as are requests to develop new tools to fill gaps in the field. Access the full guide at: [http://www.wested.org/resources/evidence-based-improvement-essa-guide-for-states](http://www.wested.org/resources/evidence-based-improvement-essa-guide-for-states%20)

## Contact Information

Nikola Filby

415.615.3124

[nfilby@WestEd.org](mailto:nfilby@WestEd.org)

Sylvie Hale

415.615.3188

[shale@WestEd.org](mailto:shale@WestEd.org)

# **Tool 3:** SEA Guidance for Evidence-Based Interventions



### Purpose

To help state education agencies (SEAs) define its approach to guiding local education agencies (LEAs) in selecting evidence-based interventions.

### Outcome

Completing this tool will result in a clearly defined and well-delineated approach to working with LEAs to select evidence-based interventions.

### Materials

In preparation, gather ESSA requirements and resources that help interpret ESSA requirements that are relevant to your program or department (see section 5 of this guide for suggested resources); relevant policy, guidance, and feedback on your SEA’s role in school and district improvement decision-making; and information on capacity and staff availability.

### Who Should Be Involved

SEA staff who oversee school and district support efforts, and those who administer or oversee the interventions that are relevant to your program/department, should be involved in working through this tool. Those involved should have substantive knowledge of SEA support efforts and requirements. Participants may include staff from one program or department, or, ideally, staff from multiple programs and offices, to support alignment across the agency. SEA research and evaluation staff would also help inform the approach to supporting schools and districts in selecting evidence-based interventions. It would be difficult to complete this tool without the input of individuals with strong quantitative research expertise, particularly with regard to how an SEA’s research capacity may influence the SEA’s approach.

### Time

Set aside 1–2 hours for each step, or longer (3 or more hours) if multiple programs or departments are working together. This time can be spaced out over several weeks, with breaks between steps to reflect or to gather additional information to inform the subsequent step(s).

### Instructions Overview (detailed instructions are provided with each step)

* Step 1: Prepare for engaging in this activity with a cross-functional SEA team by organizing the team and materials.
* Step 2: Review the ESSA requirements for your specific program or funding stream, and summarize the main points.
* Step 3: Reflect on the role and capacity of your SEA in guiding LEAs to select evidence-based interventions.
* Step 4: Using the information that you summarized in previous steps, and some additional considerations, define your SEA’s approach to guiding LEAs in selecting evidence-based interventions.
* Step 5: Begin planning by reviewing the results of your discussions and reflections, selecting implementation priorities, and describing next steps.

### Leading the Conversation

* This tool is designed to help an SEA define only the guidance and support offered to LEAs in selecting evidence-based interventions – not guidance and support in how to implement and monitor those interventions. Step 2 is a good time to clarify this purpose, so that participants understand the scope of the conversation. Team members may become frustrated if they expect to do more but do not have sufficient time or prompts to accomplish these additional tasks.
* Especially if a more prescriptive approach to selecting interventions is chosen, it will be critical to communicate with LEAs early and often, so that they understand how and why decisions have been made. As part of steps 4 and 5, carefully consider what needs to be communicated, and when and how that information is best shared.

### Modifications or Variations

* It may not be practical or appropriate for all team members to participate in each step or in all parts of a step. In step 1, for example, the organizers or facilitators might determine who will be involved and develop the meeting schedule, but the entire team might work together on gathering and reviewing documentation. Organizers and facilitators will have to determine what works best for their participants in their setting.
* Some SEA departments may choose different approaches than other departments, due to variations in ESSA requirements for their funding streams. If so, consider bringing the departments together, after completing this tool, to describe the overall SEA approach to supporting LEAs in selecting evidence-based interventions, and to determine how the overall and department-specific approaches will be communicated to LEAs.

STEP 1: Get Organized

Take time to get organized and build your knowledge base by gathering necessary materials and building a well-informed team to complete subsequent steps. Things to consider:

**Who is involved?** Identify which departments or programs should be represented; then identify the individuals who will participate in this work. What are their respective roles and responsibilities in the group (e.g., note taker, facilitator)?

| Department or Program | Name | Contact Information | Role/Responsibility |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**What do we need to know?** Gather and organize documents and other materials related to your SEA’s current approach to supporting LEAs in selecting evidence-based interventions. Review policy guidance, feedback reports, or evaluations on the role and capacity of your SEA and/or department.

| Document or Material  (title, description, source) | Why It Is Important  (what everyone should know) |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Attend to logistics**. What will the meeting schedule be? Where will you meet? What materials do you need (e.g., chart paper, sticky notes)?

Notes

STEP 2: Review ESSA Requirements

ESSA calls on SEAs to take an increased role in supporting, managing, and monitoring the implementation of evidence-based decision-making at the local level. This tool is focused on defining an SEA approach to guiding LEA selection of evidence-based interventions. This includes defining the level of specificity and prescriptiveness for how LEAs select these interventions. For example, the SEA might provide a specific list of interventions from which LEAs must choose, or develop a process for approving LEAs’ decisions, or support an open-ended process to review LEAs’ choices. For additional information related to ESSA provisions, see section 2, and the resources listed in section 5, of this guide.

As you review the ESSA requirements for your specific program or funding stream, consider the following questions:

* What element of your program or funding stream requires evidence-based interventions?
* What are the situations (e.g., high schools with low graduation rates) that trigger evidence-based interventions?
* What level of evidence is required for interventions in your program or funding stream?
* What is required in terms of SEA review and approval of plans for your program or funding stream? What are the implications for your SEA’s role and capacity?

Notes: Review and Summarize the ESSA Requirements

STEP 3: Reflect on Your SEA’s Role and Capacity to Engage with LEAs

What skills or knowledge do your SEA staff possess to guide LEAs in the process of selecting evidence-based interventions? What does your team need to consider about roles and capacity before defining an approach for selecting evidence-based interventions? Note that capacity encompasses a number of dimensions, from human capacity (Do you have the people to do it?) to organizational capacity (Do you have the processes and structures to guide this work?) and material capacity (Do you have the technology and necessary materials to support the work?). The following questions are intended to help guide your conversations with your SEA colleagues to determine your approach.

### SEA Role

* How does our SEA’s past practice or policy regarding the degree of centralized or local control impact how we choose to work with LEAs to select evidence-based interventions?
* How prescriptive do we want to be as a state agency?
* What authority does our SEA have under state laws, policies, and regulations?
* What have our past approaches to providing guidance to LEAs in other programs or funding streams been? What would we like to keep or change about how we approach providing guidance to LEAs? What changes do we need to make to align with ESSA requirements?

### SEA Capacity

* What is our SEA’s capacity to conduct or review and summarize research on the effectiveness of interventions? What resources outside of the SEA, such as our Regional Educational Laboratory, can assist us?
* What is our SEA’s capacity to approve LEAs’ approaches?
* What is our SEA’s capacity to provide technical assistance to LEAs on selecting evidence-based interventions?
* What is our SEA’s capacity to monitor LEAs’ evidence-based intervention selection processes?

Summarize and Reflect on the Role and Capacity of Your SEA.

STEP 4: Define Your SEA’s Approach

Considering the role and capacity of your SEA in selecting evidence-based interventions, what will your approach be under ESSA? Consider the following questions:

### Clarify Your Approach

* Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind, what was our state’s approach to guidance on selecting evidence-based interventions? What lessons did we learn about that approach that can be applied to our ESSA approach?
* How does our specific program or funding stream shape our approach?
* How does the timeline for planning or implementation within our specific program or funding stream affect our approach?
* Can additional information from our summaries in previous steps of this tool be used to influence how we will design our approach?
* Under what conditions would we differentiate our approach for LEAs?

### Clarify Your Support

* What kinds of support will our SEA provide to help LEAs make local decisions around evidence-based interventions?
* How will we describe our approach to LEAs? How will we describe it to other departments within the SEA?
* What will our SEA produce to guide LEAs? A list of interventions to choose from, a guidance document that shares the criteria that the SEA will use to vet LEA plans, or something else?
* What resources—staffing, funding, and training—will be needed for following through on and sustaining our proposed approach?
* What are our immediate next steps?

Summarize your SEA’s approach and the support that you will offer to LEAs in selecting evidence-based interventions.

STEP 5: Plan Next Steps

Review the results of your discussions and reflections, select implementation priorities, and describe next steps.

Implementation Priorities

Next Steps