



Center for
Applied Research and
Educational Improvement
University of Minnesota

A MEMO ON THE DEFINITION OF EVIDENCE-BASED
UNDER THE EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT

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January 16, 2017

Research, Development and Engagement to Improve Education

How to Cite this Report

Dupuis, D.N. (2016). *A memo on the definition of evidence-based under the Every Student Succeeds Act*. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota.

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A Memo on the Definition of Evidence-Based Under the Every Student Succeeds Act

The most current reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), provides a definition of “evidence-based” to guide state and local education agencies when making curricular and instructional programming adoption decisions. Under ESSA, evidence-based refers to any school “activity, strategy, or intervention” that,

demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on: a) Strong evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study; b) moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or c) promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias...and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention (ESSA, 2015, pp. 290).

Further, activities, strategies, and interventions not funded under Section 1003 of ESEA (i.e., the School Improvement fund) are considered evidence-based if there is a demonstrated “rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is *likely to improve* [emphasis added] student outcomes or other relevant outcomes and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention (ESSA, 2015, pp. 290).”

In September 2016, the US Department of Education (USDOE) provided additional information to state and local education agencies regarding the definition of evidence-based under ESSA in a document titled *Non-Regulatory Guidance: Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). In this document, the USDOE clarifies that “well-designed and well-implemented” experimental studies (i.e., studies demonstrating strong evidence under ESSA) are studies that meet the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards *without reservations* and that well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental studies (i.e., studies demonstrating moderate evidence under ESSA) are studies that meet the WWC evidence standards *with reservations*. The USDOE further clarifies that a well-designed and well-implemented correlational study is one that uses sampling or statistical methods to reduce the difference(s) between intervention and comparison groups at baseline.

Since 1989, over 50 research studies designed to examine the effectiveness of the Read Naturally intervention have been conducted. Two of these studies provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of Read Naturally, four provide moderate evidence for the effectiveness of Read Naturally, and an additional three studies meet the ESSA definition of providing *promising* evidence for the effectiveness of Read Naturally. In addition, the findings in the majority of the remaining studies that do not meet the definition of evidence-based are consistent with the findings in the studies that do meet the definition of evidence-based (i.e., they show positive student outcomes). Further, there are multiple studies that show Read Naturally is an effective intervention, but that did not meet the definition of evidence-based

because of methodological flaws in the studies' designs, not because Read Naturally was ineffective for the schools and students represented in those studies.

The definition of evidence-based under ESSA requires there be “at least one” study on a particular outcome for the intervention to be considered evidence-based for that outcome. As such, there is strong evidence to support the use of Read Naturally in the domain of reading fluency, moderate evidence to support the use of Read Naturally in the domain of general reading achievement, and promising evidence for to support the use of Read Naturally in the domain of reading comprehension. In conclusion, there is substantial evidence to support the use of Read Naturally by state and local education agencies, including multiple demonstrations of strong evidence under ESSA.

Strong Evidence for Read Naturally

- Arvans, R. (2010). Improving reading fluency and comprehension in elementary students using Read Naturally. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 71(01B), 74-649.
- Christ, T. J., & Davies, J. (2009). Empirical evaluation of Read Naturally effects: A randomized control trial. *Unpublished manuscript, University of Minnesota*.

Moderate Evidence for Read Naturally

- Graves, A. W., Duesbery, L., Pyle, N. B., Brandon, R. R., & McIntosh, A. S. (2011). Two studies of Tier II literacy development: Throwing sixth graders a lifeline. *The Elementary School Journal*, 111(4), 641–661.
- Heistad, D. (2008). The effects of Read Naturally on grade 3 reading. Unpublished manuscript, Minneapolis Public Schools.
- Heistad, D. (n.d.). A Minneapolis study of the effects of Read Naturally on uency and reading comprehension: A supplemental service intervention. Minnesota: Minneapolis Public Schools.
- Tucker, C. (2010). Response-to-intervention: Increasing fluency, rate, and accuracy for students at risk for reading failure (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Walden University, Baltimore, MD.

Promising Evidence for Read Naturally

- Read Naturally, Inc. (n.d.). *Case 7: First graders, South Forsyth County, GA*. Retrieved from <http://www.readnaturally.com>
- Read Naturally, Inc. (n.d.). *Case 11: Second graders, Elk River, MN*. Retrieved from <http://www.readnaturally.com>
- Read Naturally, Inc. (n.d.). *Case 10: Third graders, Southern CA*. Retrieved from <http://www.readnaturally.com>

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The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. Pub. L. No. 114-195 § 114 Stat. 1117 (2016).

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2016, September). Non-regulatory guidance: Using evidence to strengthen educational investments. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov>.

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse. (2013, July). Beginning Reading intervention report: Read Naturally®. Retrieved from <http://whatworks.ed.gov/>.