

## Questions and Answers About Using WWC Resources to Identify Interventions That Meet ESSA Tiers of Evidence

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to the questions submitted before and during the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) technical assistance webinar, “Using WWC Resources to Identify Interventions That Meet ESSA Tiers of Evidence.” The webinar was hosted on March 6, 2020.

This document is meant to serve as a companion to the webinar slide deck and webinar recording, which can be found [here on the WWC website](#). We combined similar questions and rephrased others for clarity while preserving the meaning of the original questions. If additional questions arise, please contact the WWC Help Desk at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/help>.

### QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WWC AND ESSA RATINGS ON THE WWC WEBSITE

#### 1. Can studies rated *Does Not Meet WWC Standards* meet ESSA evidence definitions?

The WWC did not assign ESSA ratings to studies rated *Does Not Meet WWC Standards*. ESSA ratings on the WWC website are based on the information captured in study reviews, not the studies themselves. The review of studies rated *Does Not Meet WWC Standards* does not include information needed to determine an ESSA rating, such as the significance of findings, setting, or sample characteristics. Although studies rated *Does Not Meet WWC Standards* do not have an ESSA rating on the WWC website, they may satisfy the ESSA evidence definitions for Tier 3 or Tier 4. If you find a study that is of interest to you and the WWC rated it *Does Not Meet WWC Standards* or the study is ineligible for review, you should do your own review of that study to decide if it aligns with the ESSA evidence definitions and meets your needs.

#### 2. What if my context does not align with an outcome of an intervention that meets ESSA definitions for Tier 1?

Context under ESSA includes a district or state’s population and setting. For Tier 1, both must overlap with the sample and setting of the study or studies used to determine an ESSA rating. If only the population or only the setting overlaps, then the outcome of interest aligns with the ESSA definitions for Tier 2. If neither population nor setting overlap, then the outcome of interest aligns with the ESSA definitions for Tier 3. It is important to remember that ESSA Tier ratings on the WWC website are for eligibility only. The final decision about ESSA tiers must be reached at the local level once the population and setting of interest have been compared to the sample and setting of the outcome.

**3. I found a study where some of the outcomes have ESSA tags, but the sample size is smaller than 350. How can that happen?**

Studies that evaluate the same program can be combined to produce an ESSA rating. One study with 100 participants can be combined with another study with 250 participants if they both evaluate the same outcomes of the same program, and the sample size requirement of 350 will be met. The ESSA rating algorithm combines studies of the same program to produce an ESSA rating for individual findings.

**4. Does the WWC plan to assign ESSA Tier 3 and 4 ratings? If yes, when?**

The WWC is exploring the possibility of assigning ESSA Tier 3 ratings. A timeline for the release of Tier 3 ratings will be announced in the coming months. Sign up for IES news to hear more about it at <https://ies.ed.gov/newsflash/>. IES currently does not plan to add ESSA ratings for Tier 4 to the WWC website because criteria for Tier 4 include a well-defined logic model. This information is not captured in the WWC review of studies and, therefore, is not available for making an ESSA determination.

**5. Does the year of the study affect the rating?**

The year of the study does not affect ESSA ratings on the WWC website. If the study has been reviewed under the 2.1 or later versions of the WWC standards, outcomes that meet ESSA evidence definitions will have ESSA ratings.

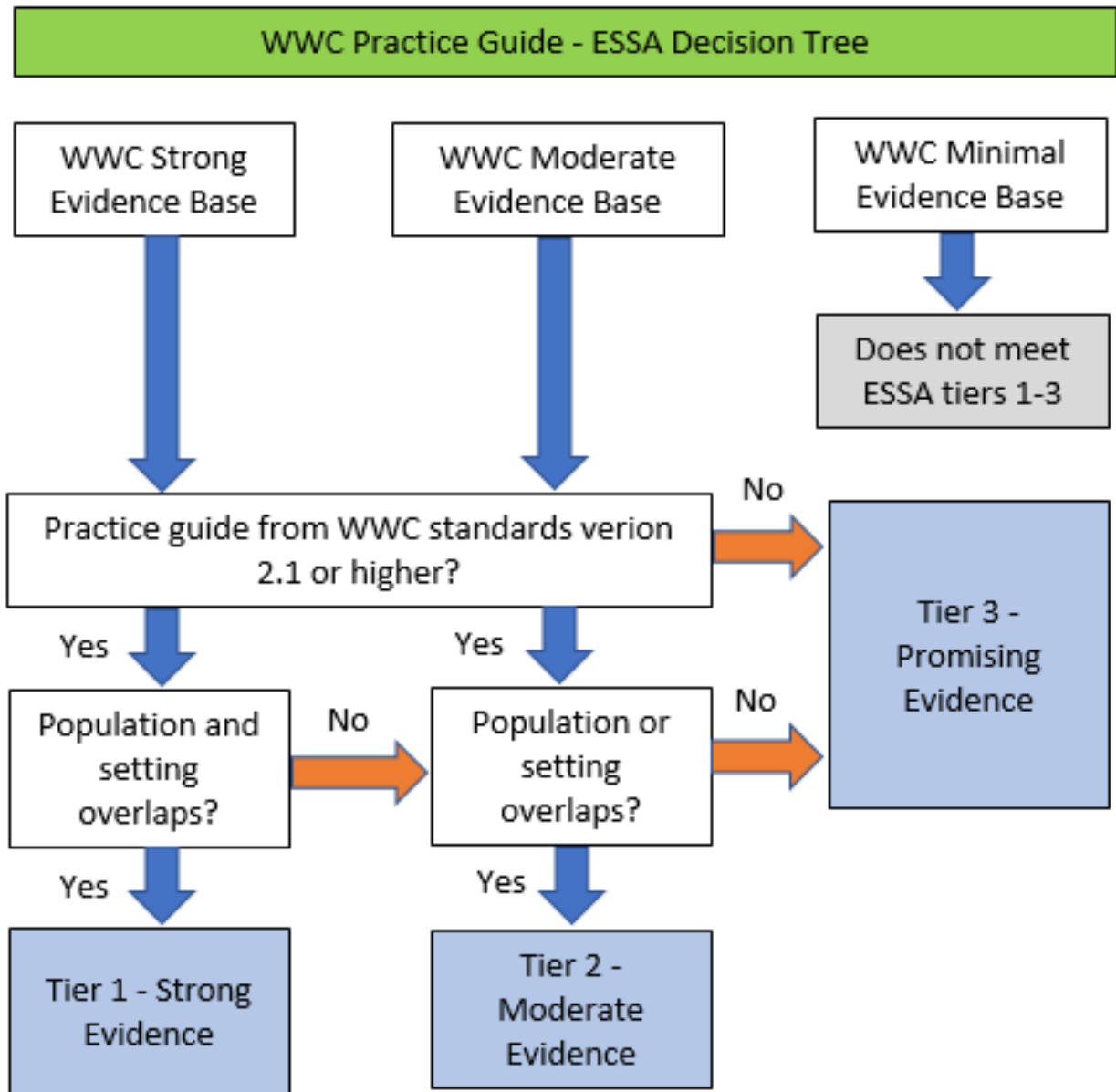
**6. When will new programs be reviewed for ESSA alignment and added to the WWC?**

When the WWC reviews new studies, which is an ongoing process, they are automatically evaluated for ESSA alignment. As soon as a study review appears on the WWC website, it will have an ESSA rating if it has findings that align with the ESSA evidence definitions.

**7. How should we crosswalk the practice guide recommendations with ESSA tier ratings?**

The WWC has two resources that describe how to align practice guides with the ESSA tier ratings. One resource is a webinar “How Teachers Can Use the WWC Practice Guides” available at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Multimedia/47>. The figure below, which shows a crosswalk between the WWC practice guides and ESSA evidence tiers, is included in this webinar. The second resource that addresses practice guides and ESSA tiers is also a webinar, called “Using the WWC to Find Strong or Moderate Evidence,” which is available at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Multimedia/43>.

**Figure 1. Alignment between the WWC Practice Guides and Criteria for ESSA Evidence Tiers**



## GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT ESSA EVIDENCE DEFINITIONS

### 8. What is the threshold for reasonable overlap with setting and sample?

ESSA does not provide guidelines for the level of overlap between setting and sample in a study and setting and sample of interest. We recommend that you use your best judgement to determine if a district or state's population and setting sufficiently overlap with the sample and setting used in the study or studies.

### 9. Outside of sample or setting criteria for Tier 1 or Tier 2 rating, what evidence is used to determine if a study meets a promising level of evidence?

To meet ESSA's evidence definitions for Tier 3 (promising evidence), a study should use a correlational design with statistical controls for selection bias, demonstrate a positive effect on at least one outcome, with no overriding negative effects from other well-designed and implemented studies. Additionally, findings can be designated as Tier 3 if they would otherwise meet the criteria for Tiers 1 or 2, but do not meet the large, multisite sample or context overlap requirements.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT THE WWC REVIEW PROCEDURES

### 10. What is the WWC's process for reviewing studies from external vendors or re-reviewing programs that were first reviewed several years ago?

Because of the large amount of research literature in the field of education, the WWC must prioritize topic areas for review. Once a topic is selected and a review protocol developed, the WWC conducts a systematic and comprehensive search for relevant literature. If a study identified during the literature search falls within the scope of review protocol, it will undergo a WWC review, regardless of who conducted the study. Occasionally, the WWC needs to re-review a study previously reviewed by the WWC. This occurs for two reasons. The most common reason is that the study has been identified for review using a protocol that differs from the one that guided the original review. For example, a study might have been originally reviewed for the adolescent literacy topic area and later identified for review for the secondary writing topic area. A second circumstance that might prompt the WWC to re-review a study is that the study has been identified for review by the WWC and the original review was conducted under version 2.0 or earlier of the WWC Standards and Procedures Handbook. Detailed information about the WWC's policies for prioritizing studies for review is available in Appendix A of the WWC Procedures Handbook, version 4.1.

### 11. Is there anything program creators can do to have their program reviewed by the WWC?

Program creators can recommend a study or intervention for a WWC review by contacting the WWC Help Desk at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Help>. Recommending a study or intervention for review does not guarantee that it will be reviewed. In making decisions about reviews, the WWC uses recommendations from the public to the WWC Help Desk along with other important criteria, such as the potential of intervention to improve key outcomes, applicability to a broad range of students or to particularly important subpopulations, policy

relevance, the perceived demand within the education community, and the availability of rigorous research. Detailed information about how the WWC prioritizes reviews is available in Appendix A of the WWC Procedures Handbook, version 4.1.

**12. Why is a certain branded intervention with multiple studies that meet standards and a rating of mixed effects not being implement across the country, when other interventions with no research evidence are being implemented?**

The WWC reviews and disseminates information related to study design and the effectiveness of interventions. The WWC does not endorse or provide guidance about which programs or interventions states and districts should implement. Several factors may influence intervention choices by school, district, and state leaders, such as cost, context, and professional development supports. The addition of ESSA tiers of evidence to the WWC website provides additional information about effectiveness to support states and districts when they search for evidence-based approaches.

## General Resources

In addition to the webinar and this Questions and Answers document, the following resources provide guidance about the WWC's Standards and Procedures and ESSA. These include resources shared in the chat box during the webinar.

- *WWC Standards Handbook, Version 4.1:*  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/referenceresources/WWC-Standards-Handbook-v4-1-508.pdf>.
- *WWC Procedures Handbook, Version 4.1:*  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/referenceresources/WWC-Procedures-Handbook-v4-1-508.pdf>.
- *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (as amended through P. L. 115-224, enacted July 31, 2018):* <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/legislation/index.html>.
- *Every Student Succeeds Act:*  
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/index.html>.
- *U.S. Department of Education's non-regulatory guidance for using evidence:*  
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceuseinvestment.pdf>.
- *WWC webinar, How Teachers Can Use the WWC Practice Guides:*  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Multimedia/47>.
- *WWC Webinar, Using the WWC to Find Strong or Moderate Evidence:*  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Multimedia/43>.
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