

WWC Webinar: How Teachers Can Use the WWC Practice Guides

Responses to Attendee Questions

If you are working in a school or district where perhaps there isn't a lot of support yet that has been generated for using the Practice Guides, what recommendations would you have for teachers working in those schools either to individually make use of those Practice Guides or to generate more support in their school or district to use them?

Tara Thornton Garrett, Partnership Academy: We actually have a great example. We have one specific grade level that was having more growth than other grade levels, and we were able to connect that teacher's actions to recommendations and the What Works guide. For teachers, seeing someone actually already having those specific instructional moves really encouraged and motivated them to want to replicate those same teacher actions. It seemed that seeing that the recommendations were actually working was a great motivation for teachers. The recommendation was working, and we were really looking at how to carry out the recommendation in our grade-level teams. We've combined grade-level teams because the first grade level was performing very well in the area of fluency, so we combined those grade-level teams, and teachers were talking directly to peers that were already effectively carrying out that recommendation. So getting buy-in from a peer really helped them to see that the research is really working. I can say we're seeing the growth now where we've been really consistent on not just doing things that are comfortable, but using the evidence to really drive our instruction. It's made a huge difference.

Before the grade-level team meetings [at Tara's school], did you ask that all of the teachers read the Practice Guides in advance? Were there certain kinds of activities they were engaged in? What were checks and balances, and progress checks, throughout the process?

Tara Thornton Garrett: Teachers read the Practice Guide recommendations in advance. We went through one recommendation at a time. After that, we spent most of our time during our PLCs and coaching action plans focusing on how to carry out the recommendation. That was the process during our PLCs and one-on-one coaching. And for teachers who needed more support, their action plans were a little bit more in-depth, with the coaches involved in modeling and co-planning with them to carry out the Practice Guide recommendations.

Should we start with the recommendations based on the strongest evidence, then moderate, and lastly minimum, or is there another way to approach looking at the recommendations or other considerations to think about?

Lyz Davis, American Institutes for Research: My take is that you should really start with the cycle of continuous improvement. If you are visualizing the cycle, you really do need to start with, "What do I

need to improve? What am I looking to improve for my schools or my students?” Also, stronger evidence does not necessarily mean better evidence. It just means that there's more evidence out there. The evidence tiers are living designations, which means that as more evidence comes out in support of a practice or an intervention, that practice or intervention can actually move up the evidence chain. So I would always start with “What is it that we want to improve?” and focus less on trying to get to the strongest level of evidence, if that makes sense.

What are some strategies to use for finding and evaluating evidence-based practices and programs?

Lyz Davis: We have added ESSA Tiers 1 and 2 to select findings from studies on the Clearinghouse website that have been reviewed under standards versions 2.1 or higher, and you'll find those in the Reviews of Individual Studies databases. The Data from Individual Studies database also has a really great new filter function to help you pinpoint findings and studies that meet ESSA Tiers 1 and 2. In addition, REL Midwest has a crosswalk document based on ESSA tiers. These resources are all based on the same general decision-making principles.

Can the study meet What Works standards with or without reservations and still align to one of the ESSA tiers?

Lyz Davis: A study that meets What Works Clearinghouse standards with or without reservations, if it's been reviewed under standards version 2.1 or higher, is eligible to have its findings meet the ESSA tiers. However, there are several other criteria that go into that decision. It's the finding that gets the designation, not the study itself. If a finding has a significant positive effect and there are no significant negative effects from the same outcome and the same intervention (from other studies that meet the clearinghouse standards), if the sample includes at least 350 participants in the analysis, and if the sample includes more than one school, the finding may meet the designation. Those are the minimum requirements. In addition, the district- or school-specific criteria for meeting an ESSA tier designation is that your population and setting need to overlap with the study's sample and setting. So there are other criteria beyond the WWC rating that go along with making that designation.

Are findings from single case designs eligible to meet ESSA Tiers 1 and 2?

Lyz Davis: Single case designs can meet the criteria. There is a different set of WWC review standards that are used for single case designs, and there are also different standards used for regression discontinuity designs, but for each of those, if they can meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards, their findings can be eligible to meet ESSA Tiers 1 and 2.

Will the work Rebecca mentioned with a particular state education agency be made publicly available? Is there any part of the work that can be shared with others?

Rebecca Bates, American Institutes for Research: The work was the basis for the state's development of a standards portal to help standards-based instruction. Part of that is improving core instruction, so they will be taking a few of these practices that we identified across content areas for their standards portal, which will be released in August/September. The state is going to take four different high-leverage practices, talk about how they apply to the different areas, and apply some of the strategies. Schools and districts can then go through the same process to make determinations on their own.

Some of the studies and interventions reviewed on the WWC website are several years old. Will newer interventions be reviewed in the future?

Christopher Weiss, Institute of Education Sciences: We are continuously adding new material to the Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse runs a help desk that is our main point of contact for people that would like to see a particular program reviewed, would like to know more about a particular practice, or have other questions. We are very responsive to the help desk, so if there are things that relate to your practice that you're not seeing on the website, please do let us know.

There are some strategies, programs, and practices that previously had reviews on the WWC, but the reviews are no longer available. Is there an archive of these previous reviews? Why might a review be removed from the main website?

Christopher Weiss: Yes, we do have an archive. In cases where we have updates of previous Intervention Reports or Practice Guides, we do have an archive of the former version(s). Our strategy is to make the most recent information available on the website so it's easy to find and easy to identify. But in the name of transparency, we also want to make available all the work that we've done, so we have it in a separate place. We wanted to make previous reviews available, because reviews that were done 10 or 15 years ago may cover interventions that are still being used in schools. We don't want to take away resources that some people find beneficial, but at the same time we want to consider ways to screen out older reviews that may not be as germane as they once were.

Will older WWC Practice Guides be updated?

Christopher Weiss: Yes, we do update Practice Guides. When we update a Practice Guide, it happens because there has been new substantial research about the topic, and we want to provide information about new approaches and new successful strategies. We also want to expand the number of Guides that we have to address new topics that haven't been the subject of previous Practice Guides. Our goal is to strike a balance between updating with new information where appropriate, but also introducing new topics and covering new practices.