

Making Evidence-Based Decisions: WWC Ratings and Evidence Levels

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) reviews the research on programs, products, practices, and policies in education. The WWC offers several types of resources, each with specific ratings and elements and a process to determine those ratings. These ratings provide WWC users with important information about the research and the strength of the evidence presented.



Individual Study Reviews are the ingredients to **WWC Practice Guides** and **Intervention Reports**. Although individual study reviews can support evidence-based decisionmaking, findings from one study may not represent all that is known about the effectiveness of an intervention.

Ratings



MEETS WWC STANDARDS WITHOUT RESERVATIONS

The highest rating findings can receive is **Meets WWC Standards Without Reservations**. This rating is reserved for findings based on a strong research design that is well-executed and therefore provides the highest degree of confidence that the intervention caused the observed effect.



MEETS WWC STANDARDS WITH RESERVATIONS

The second-highest rating findings can receive is **Meets WWC Standards With Reservations**. Because of natural limitations in research designs or because of circumstances around execution of a design, findings that receive this rating do not sufficiently rule out that something other than the intervention caused the observed effect.



DOES NOT MEET WWC STANDARDS

The lowest research rating is **Does Not Meet WWC Standards**. Findings that receive this rating are not accompanied by sufficient evidence that the intervention caused the observed effect.

Note: Some regression discontinuity designs and single case designs also may meet WWC standards, either without or with reservations.



Intervention Reports

- Synthesize evidence for an intervention based on a systematic review of studies that examined the intervention. The intervention may be a “branded” program or product
- Describe the intervention in detail, including its costs
- Show how and where the intervention was implemented
- Indicate whether the intervention was effective at improving important student outcomes

Ratings

Positive effects:
Evidence across multiple studies that the intervention had a positive effect on outcomes

Uncertain effects (previously mixed or no discernible effects):
No discernible evidence that the intervention had either a positive or negative effect on outcomes

Negative effects:
Evidence across multiple studies that the intervention had a negative effect on outcomes

Potentially positive effects:
Some evidence that the intervention had a positive effect on outcomes, but evidence is not as strong

Potentially negative effects:
Some evidence that the intervention had a negative effect on outcomes, but evidence is not as strong



Practice Guides

- Synthesize evidence to identify teaching methods, learning strategies, and other approaches to learning that may improve educational outcomes. Practice guides do not focus on “branded” programs or products
- Combine rigorous research with deep knowledge of experts and practitioners
- Include specific recommendations and examples
- Share advice from experts on how to address roadblocks to success

Ratings



Strong Evidence

There is consistent evidence that meets WWC standards and indicates that the practices improve student outcomes for a diverse population of students.



Moderate Evidence

There is some evidence meeting WWC standards that the practices improve student outcomes, but there may be ambiguity about whether that improvement is the direct result of the practices or whether the findings can be replicated with a diverse population of students.



Minimal Evidence

Evidence may not meet standards or may exhibit inconsistencies, but the panel determined that the recommendation must be included because the intervention is based on strong theory, is new and has not yet been studied, or is difficult to study with a rigorous research design.



What Goes Into a Rating?

Individual Study Review ratings are based on the strength of the design. Ratings for both **Intervention Reports** and **Practice Guides** depend on statistical significance and direction (positive or negative) for each outcome domain and proportion of findings rated as **Meets WWC Standards Without Reservations** versus **Meets WWC Standards With Reservations**.

Practice Guide levels of evidence also depend on the relevance of study samples and findings to each recommendation and expert opinions informed by research.

To learn more about the WWC, visit our website: whatworks.ed.gov.

For more information about ratings and evidence levels, check out our Evidence Tiers and WWC Ratings resource page: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Resources/Evidence>.