

REVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDIES OF INTERVENTIONS FOR STUDENTS IN NEED OF POSTSECONDARY DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION VERSION 4.0

This protocol guides the review of research that informs the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) intervention reports in the Developmental Education topic area. The protocol is used in conjunction with the *WWC Procedures and Standards Handbooks (version 4.0)*.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

Not all students enrolled in college are prepared to do college-level work in all subjects. Anticipating this need, most colleges have established processes that are intended to identify students who are not prepared to do college-level work. For example, colleges may establish a threshold score on an entrance test, such as the SAT or ACT, and/or require that students take a placement test. Students who are not prepared for college-level work would then be placed into developmental (or remedial) education, which involves taking courses that are intended to help students succeed. These courses are usually offered on a non-credit basis; therefore, they do not count toward graduation requirements. Alternatively, students who are not prepared for college-level work may be offered corequisite remediation, which involves coupling mainstream, credit-bearing college classes with mandatory non-credit remedial support.

WWC reviews in this topic area focus on developmental education interventions that help incoming and current postsecondary students prepare for college-level coursework, increase academic achievement, improve course completion rates, improve labor market outcomes, and increase degree or certification attainment. Systematic reviews of evidence in this topic area address the following research questions:

- Which developmental education interventions are effective at helping students improve access and enrollment in college?
- Which developmental education interventions are effective at helping students increase credit accumulation and persistence in college?
- Which developmental education interventions are effective at helping students improve academic achievement?
- Which developmental education interventions are effective at helping students complete college?
- Which developmental education interventions are effective at helping students improve their prospects in the labor market?
- Is the reviewed intervention more or less effective for certain subgroups of students (including first-generation college students, women, racial/ethnic minorities, academically underprepared students, or students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds [e.g., Pell Grant recipients], and/or community college students)?

KEY DEFINITIONS

The descriptions below capture some of the types of interventions that are covered by this protocol. However, it is not a comprehensive list of the programs, policies, and interventions that are covered.

Bridge Interventions

Developmental *bridge interventions* are programs that aim to provide postsecondary enrollees with academic and college preparation skills. The goal of developmental bridge interventions is to provide students with targeted academic support and the social capital needed to succeed in college. Typically, these programs will provide accelerated instruction in one or more subject areas (e.g., math, English, reading), provide general academic or other student support services, provide information about the academic expectations and cultural contexts of colleges, and expose students to college faculty and administrators. These “summer bridge” programs typically provide services in the summer or another period immediately preceding postsecondary enrollment, although additional supplementary or ongoing services may be provided after enrollment. These interventions can be delivered in a residential or non-residential framework, and can involve either mandatory or voluntary participation.

Corequisite Remediation (Mainstreaming)

Corequisite remediation involves coupling mainstream, credit-bearing college classes with mandatory non-credit remedial support. These interventions are designed to help improve academic achievement, accelerate credit accumulation, and increase college completion rates by mainstreaming students into credit-bearing courses instead of placing them into non-credit-bearing developmental classes. Academic supports are provided through mandatory class periods or labs that are coupled with the introductory course. Other course-based interventions, including acceleration or traditional multi-course sequences, are also common.

First Year Experience Programs

First year experience courses for students in developmental education are designed to ease the transition to college for students in need of developmental (or remedial) education. First year experience courses (also called success courses, study skills, student development, or new student orientation courses) occur during the first year of students’ enrollment in postsecondary education. The aim of these courses is to support the academic performance, social development, persistence, and degree completion of postsecondary students with developmental needs. Although first year experience courses vary in terms of content and focus, most are designed to introduce students to campus resources, provide training in time management and study skills, and address student development issues. For students in developmental education, the courses are often linked with or taken concurrently with developmental courses and the first year experience courses tend to focus more on study skills than those for general education students.

Learning Communities

Learning communities are curricular linkages that provide students with a deeper examination and/or integration of the themes and concepts that they are learning (Inkelas & Soldner, 2008). There are many different models of learning communities (for example, residential learning

communities; see Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith 1990; Inkelas & Soldner, 2008; and Lenning & Ebbers, 1999 for typologies). This WWC review focuses on two types: linked learning communities and residential learning communities.

Linked learning communities involve connecting courses to mutually reinforcing themes and assignments. Studies of this version of the learning communities model will have students take at least two courses together (i.e., in the same classroom at the same time). To be eligible as a linked learning community, at least two of the linked courses must be taken during the same semester or quarter. Residential learning communities involve students who live together (usually in a residential dormitory), take certain classes together, and engage in structured co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Identifying Studies for Review

The [*WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook* \(version 4.0\)](#) discusses general procedures for conducting a literature search. Once interventions have been identified as being targets for an intervention report, the WWC will conduct an electronic database search and supplement it with targeted searches of government and non-government agency websites, relevant non-profit organizations that might fund research on the intervention, and by reviewing the bibliographies of literature reviews, meta-analyses, and primary studies of the intervention under review. The review team will also search the WWC database of previously reviewed studies to identify studies that have met standards in prior reviews. Those studies will be re-reviewed using the eligibility criteria and evidence standards described in this protocol. The team will also identify studies that have been rated as ineligible in prior reviews and will confirm that they are ineligible for this review based on the criteria described in this protocol. A broad search strategy for the interventions for students in developmental education topic area is detailed in Appendix A.

Studies must meet several criteria to be eligible for review. These relate to the population that was sampled, the intervention that was studied, the study design that was used, outcomes that were measured, and when the study was conducted. Each of these is discussed below.

Eligible Populations

To be eligible for review under this protocol, a study must include (a) postsecondary students (including students who have been admitted to college but who have not yet started their college careers or matriculated into a program) (b) in the United States or Canada, and (c) at least two thirds of whom are in, have been recommended for, or have been formally identified (e.g., via a placement test) as at risk for being placed into developmental education.

In general, the WWC determines a study rating based on average intervention effects and will report subgroup analyses only for groups that are identified in the protocol as being of theoretical, policy, or practical interest. For studies reviewed under this protocol, eligible subgroups include:

- first-generation college students
- racial/ethnic minorities

- gender
- students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, such as Pell Grant recipients
- level of academic preparation, such as placement test results
- community college students.

Eligible Interventions

In order to be eligible for review, interventions must have been designed to help students be ready to pursue college-level coursework. Interventions in this area are diverse, and by way of example can include (but are not limited to):

- Learning communities (curricular linkages that provide students with a deeper examination and/or integration of the themes and concepts that they are learning; models include residential learning communities and cohort-based learning communities)
- Bridge interventions (remedial interventions that occur prior to the start of the first semester of postsecondary education)
- College success courses (courses that teach a variety of skills, including, but not limited to, study skills, and that often serve as an orientation to college life)
- Instructional strategies (studies of different instructional techniques, including but not limited to infusing meta-cognitive strategies into class instruction)
- Psychological interventions (interventions based on applied psychology, such as interventions to reduce math anxiety or to increase motivation)
- Specific skill instruction (embedding study skill instruction into a developmental education course)
- Supplemental instruction (providing additional instructional time, such as in corequisite remediation)
- Needs assessment practices that inform placement or intervention decisions.

See the section “Key Definitions,” above, for the operational definitions of interventions that are the subject (or potentially are the subject) of WWC reviews.

Only interventions that are replicable are eligible for review. The following characteristics of an intervention will be documented by the WWC, so that practitioners other than developers can reliably reproduce the intervention with different participants, in different settings, and at other times:

- Targeted population;
- Description of intervention provider or administrator, including their qualifications;

- Description of the intervention, including details of the services provided, unit of delivery (e.g., whole class, individual), medium/media of delivery (e.g., teacher-led instruction or software), and other activities that are part of the intervention;
- Length of calendar time and number of hours required to implement the intervention;
- Cost, which may include staff salaries to participate in training or provide the intervention; expenses for space, materials, and equipment needed for training and/or providing the intervention; travel and per diem expenses for training; price charged for intervention participants; and other intervention inputs; and
- Source of funding (when available).

Eligible Research

In order to be eligible for review a study must be a primary analysis of the effects of an intervention. If a study does not examine the effects of an intervention, or if it is not a primary analysis (e.g., if it is a meta-analysis or other literature review), then it is not eligible for review.

- **Topic.** The study must be focused the effects of a developmental education intervention on one or more measures of enrollment, credit accumulation, persistence, academic achievement, educational attainment, or labor market outcomes.
- **Time frame.** The study must have been published within 20 years of the year of the review (for example, 1999 or later for reviews occurring in 2019). Rigorous evaluations of interventions implemented in this time frame test versions of interventions most likely to be available today and under conditions most likely to be current. For updated intervention reports, the study must have been released since the original intervention report’s literature search start date (i.e., 1992 for reports released under version 3.0 of the Developmental Education Protocol and 1994 for reports released under version 3.1 of the protocol). Studies must be publicly available (accessible online or available through a publication, such as a journal) at the time of the original or updated literature search.
- **Sample.** The study sample must meet the requirements described in the “Eligible Populations” section above.
- **Design.** The study must be empirical, using quantitative methods and inferential statistical analysis, and as described by the *WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook* (version 4.0), must take the form of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) or use a quasi-experimental design (QED), a regression discontinuity design (RDD), or a single-case design (SCD).
- **Language.** The study must be available in English.
- **Location.** The study must include students in the United States, in its territories or tribal entities, at U.S. military bases overseas, or in Canada.

Review team leadership should be notified when studies present counterfactuals other than business-as-usual (BAU), such as studies that compare two interventions to one another. These studies will be reviewed by review team leadership to determine whether their results can be reasonably combined with other studies without biasing WWC calculations. Review team

leadership will advise reviewers on characteristics of the comparison condition to document so the counterfactual can be clearly documented in WWC reports.

Eligible Outcomes

To be eligible for review a study must also assess a relevant outcome domain. These domains relate to the extent to which students enter into, successfully make progress through, and successfully exit from postsecondary education: (a) college enrollment, (b) progressing in developmental education, (c) progressing in college, (d) academic achievement, (e) postsecondary degree attainment, (f) credential attainment, (g) employment, and (h) earnings. When measures from an official and an unofficial source are available (e.g., grades reported by the institution vs. self-report) the WWC will focus on the official source.

- **College enrollment** refers to the process of applying to, actually enrolling in, or attending a postsecondary institution. Examples of ways that enrollment might be operationally defined in studies include: (a) actual enrollment in college; (b) number and/or selectivity of admitted and/or enrolling institutions, (c) enrollment by institution type (2 year vs. 4 year), (d) intensity of enrollment (full time vs. part time), and (e) timing of enrollment (e.g., immediate vs. delayed enrollment after high school).
- **Progressing in developmental education** refers to the process of completing required developmental coursework. Examples of ways that progress through developmental education might be operationally defined include (a) completed versus did not complete developmental education coursework, (b) completed versus did not complete first college-level course in which remediation was needed, and (c) grades earned in developmental courses. Passing college-level courses in the area of required developmental education is the preferred measure.
- **Progressing in college** refers to progress toward the completion of a degree, certificate, or program. Examples of ways that credit accumulation might be operationally defined in studies include: (a) number of college-level credits earned, (b) number of terms of continuous enrollment, (c) enrolled vs. did not enroll the next semester, and (d) completion of a single course that was the focus of the intervention. Completion of a single course will only be reported if other measures within this domain are not reported by the study. The number of non-college level credits earned (e.g., developmental credits) is not an eligible measure of credit accumulation.
- **Academic achievement** refers to the extent to which students adequately complete expected coursework. As such, eligible measures of academic achievement are those that arise naturally from student educational experiences. Examples of ways that academic achievement might be operationally defined in studies include (a) final grade in a single college-level course, (b) grade point average (GPA) in college-level courses, and (c) the ratio of college-level courses passed vs. failed. Scores on department-wide exams, standardized tests, and professional or industry exams (e.g., the GRE or the NCLEX-RN) are also eligible. With the exception of department-wide exams, measures that exist below the final course grade level are not eligible (e.g., average test score, score on a particular assignment or project).¹ Also ineligible are measures of academic achievement

¹ The “department-wide” exam criterion ensures that students are tested consistently across treatment and comparison groups, and those exam scores contribute meaningfully to overall academic achievement.

that do not directly contribute to student grades (e.g., a math test that is given after an experimental manipulation, the performance on which has no implications for a student's performance in a specific course).

- **Postsecondary degree attainment.** This domain refers to the completion of an associate or a baccalaureate degree. Outcomes pertaining to completing or progressing toward a graduate-level degree will not be included.
- **Credential attainment.** This domain refers to the completion of an industry-recognized credential (certifications), educational certificate issued by a college or University, or government license. Examples of ways completion might be operationally defined in a study include (a) certificate completion rates, (b) non-degree-award receipt rates, and (c) certifications from third-party licensing or credentialing bodies.
- **Employment** refers to outcomes related to employment after the postsecondary experience. Examples of ways that employment outcomes might be operationally defined in studies include (a) employed vs. not, (b) employed full-time vs. employed part-time, and (c) employed in field of study vs. not, as defined by the major groups of the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System.²
- **Earnings** refers to income from employment after the postsecondary experience. Examples of ways that earnings might be operationally defined in studies include (a) cumulative earnings over the previous six months or (b) earnings in a typical week in the previous month.³ Earnings received during a student's course of study are ineligible for review.

Outcomes Measured at Different Points in Time

When outcomes are measured at multiple time points, the follow-up outcome measured closest to the end of the intervention on the full sample will be prioritized as the primary finding. This will allow for more clear attribution of the intervention to the outcome observed (especially in QEDs), relative to prioritizing the longest follow-up observation. Notable exceptions include:

- In the college enrollment domain, the first measure of enrollment (e.g., enrolled vs. not enrolled) is selected as the primary finding. Measures of continued enrollment that occur after the first semester or year of college would fall under the progressing in college domain and the follow-up outcome measured closest to the end of the intervention is selected as the primary measure.
- In the attainment domain, the longest follow-up time point will be selected as the primary finding. In the employment and earnings domains, two primary findings will be presented

² https://www.bls.gov/soc/2018/major_groups.htm

³ Total individual or household income is not an eligible outcome. An intervention that successfully increases individual earnings might decrease public benefit receipt, with the result that the participant's income might increase, decrease, or remain constant even though the intervention successfully increased earnings. Further, household income might include spousal earnings; an intervention that increases a participant's earnings might induce the spouse of the participant to reduce his/her hours worked, especially if the spouse was working an additional job to support the participant during training.

when they are available: (1) the follow-up outcome period closest to the end of the intervention and (2) the longest follow-up time point.

EVIDENCE STANDARDS

Eligible studies are assessed against WWC evidence standards, as described in the *WWC Procedures Handbook*, Section IV: Screening Studies and Section V: Reviewing Studies, as well as the *WWC Standards Handbook*. Generally, these standards assess outcome reliability and validity, attrition, baseline equivalence, and similar methodological and statistical issues. This review determines the overall WWC study rating (see the *Procedures and Standards Handbook version 4.0* for further details). Details related to sample attrition in RCTs and baseline equivalence in QEDs and high-attrition RCTs are outlined below to highlight the way they are operationalized for this topic area.

Eligible Study Designs

Studies that use group designs (RCTs and QEDs), RDDs, or single-case designs (SCDs) are eligible for review using the appropriate standards.

Outcome Measure Requirements

In this review, the requirements for outcome measures are more stringent than those specified in the *WWC Standards Handbook* (in Section IV.A: Outcome Requirements and Reporting). Specifically, this review requires a minimum of 0.60 (as measured by, for example, Cronbach's alpha), for internal consistency to satisfy the reliability requirement for an outcome measure.

Sample Attrition

The *WWC Standards Handbook* discusses the sample attrition standards used by the WWC in the following sections:

- Section II.A—"Sample Attrition: Is the combination of overall and differential attrition high?" – in Step 2 of the WWC review process for individual-level group design studies.
- Section II.B—"Is the study a cluster RCT with low cluster-level attrition?" – in Step 1 of the WWC review process for cluster-level group design studies.
- Section II.B—"Is there a risk of bias due to non-response of individuals?" – in Step 3 of the WWC review process for cluster-level group design studies.
- Section II.D—"Calculating attrition when rating CACE estimates" – in Section 3 of the WWC standards for reviewing complier average causal effect estimates.
- Section III.C—in Standard 2 of the WWC standards for reviewing regression discontinuity designs.

In the *WWC Standards Handbook*, Figure II.2 illustrates the attrition boundary and Table II.1 reports attrition levels that define high and low attrition. Based on the choice of the boundary, the study review guide calculates attrition and whether it is high or low. For most studies this review

will entail use of the *optimistic* boundary for attrition based on the assumption that most attrition in studies of developmental education would be due to factors that are not strongly related to intervention status. We assume that adult students in developmental education can have a range of life events that lead them to have missing outcome data that are unrelated to intervention status.

Joiners in Cluster Randomized Controlled Trials

According to the *WWC Standards Handbook* (page 23), to receive the highest rating a cluster RCT must limit the risk of bias due to individuals entering the cluster after the time of random assignment. This is because the presence of joiners in an analytic sample might introduce bias into estimates of an intervention's effectiveness. The WWC defines a joiner as any student who enters a cluster, such as a community college school or course, after the results of random assignment are known to any individual who could influence a student's placement into a cluster (for example, a college advisor). In some cases, joiners might enter clusters after random assignment, but before anyone outside of a study team could have known about cluster random assignment results. The WWC never considers these joiners to pose a risk of bias because the decisions that led these individuals to join clusters could not have been affected by the intervention. However, the burden for demonstrating that individuals could not have known about the intervention rests with the study authors.

In some cases, joiners who enter clusters relatively early in the study period have less potential to introduce bias than those who enter later. This is because late joiners might be more likely to do so because of the intervention. Therefore, the WWC differentiates between *early joiners* and *late joiners*. For this review protocol, we will consider college students to be *early joiners* if they enter a cluster within 6 weeks after the results of random assignment are publicly known. That is, the early period for joiners ends 6 weeks after the start of the school year if the results of random assignment were announced over the summer; otherwise, the early period ends 6 weeks after the results of random assignment were announced. *Late joiners* are those who enter clusters after 6 weeks.

With that background, the general default disposition in for this review is that ***all joiners in the analytic sample are expected to pose a risk of bias*** (there are exceptions for early joiners outlined below). Therefore, a study that includes at least one such joiner in the analytic sample does not limit the risk of bias from joiners. This is because study samples will be comprised of adults who can presumably choose their preferred education experiences, and might purposefully select or avoid a specific developmental education intervention.

An exception to the general default rule that all joiners in the analytic sample pose a risk of bias is when: (a) colleges/institutions, a group of colleges such as a coordinated group of community colleges, or blocks of courses within colleges represent the unit of assignment, and (b) the following conditions are in place:

- The intervention is not expected to directly affect joiners' enrollment or placement decisions. One example of an intervention that should not directly affect enrollment or placement decisions is when treatment and comparison groups are offered different types of potentially useful services, such as two competing developmental education interventions. In this case, we would not expect that individuals would be more likely to go out of their

way to join one developmental education intervention over the other unless there is time to closely investigate and consider the different options. In this scenario, *only late joiners pose a risk of bias*.

- Another example of an intervention that would likely not directly affect enrollment is when treatment group members receive a low-profile approach that is integrated into curricula of their community college, where individuals are unlikely to know about this add-on to the curricula even after the point of random assignment. This is consistent with aforementioned idea that joiners are likely to be unaware that a cluster is part of a study condition. In this scenario, *only late joiners pose a risk of bias*.

Not all scenarios can be anticipated. When an intervention and unit of assignment in a cluster RCT do not fall into a category described above, the Review Team Leadership has discretion to make a decision about whether the joiners pose a risk of bias. Any time such discretion is exercised, the background and rationale of decisions will be documented in intervention reports.

Baseline Equivalence

If the study design is an RCT or RDD with high levels of attrition or a QED, the study must satisfy the baseline equivalence requirement for the analytic intervention and comparison groups. The *WWC Standards Handbook* discusses how authors must satisfy the baseline equivalence requirement in:

- Section II.A—“Baseline Equivalence: Is equivalence established at baseline for the groups in the analytic sample?” – in Step 3 of the WWC review process for individual-level group design studies.
- Section II.B—“Does the study establish equivalence of individuals at baseline for groups in the analytic sample?” and “Does the study establish equivalence of clusters at baseline for groups in the analytic sample?” – in Steps 4 and 7 of the WWC review process for cluster-level group design studies, respectively.
- Section II.D—“Procedures for rating CACE estimates when attrition is high” – in Section 5 of the *WWC Standards* for reviewing complier average causal effect (CACE) estimates.
- Section III.C—in Standard 3 of the *WWC Standards* for reviewing RDDs.

This review assesses baseline equivalence within each domain and analytic sample. Elaborations follow:

- The outcome domains for this review cover multiple constructs, so an *outcome-by-outcome* approach to establishing equivalence is followed. The implication is that it is possible for a baseline difference to exceed 0.25 standard deviations on a given outcome, but this need not influence other outcomes within the domain. So, for example, a large baseline difference in mathematics will render all mathematics outcomes as not meeting WWC standards, but it would still be possible for a reading contrast from the same study to meet standards with reservations within the academic achievement domain. Furthermore, when the baseline difference for a pre-intervention measure is in the statistical adjustment range (that is, it is between 0.05 and 0.25 standard deviations), the

adjustment must be made only in the analysis of the associated outcome measure. For example, if A, B, and C are available as pre- and post-intervention measures all within one domain, and the pre-intervention difference in B requires statistical adjustment, only the analysis of outcome B only must adjust for B.

- In cases where multiple baseline measures of SES and/or academic achievement are available, the Review Team Leadership is responsible for selecting the variable(s) to be used in the baseline equivalence assessment prior to the equivalence assessment being performed. For example, if both math and verbal scores on a college entrance exam are available, and the primary outcome is whether or not students passed their first college level math course, then the Review Team Leadership may decide that the score on the math portion of the entrance exam is the only achievement measure on which baseline equivalence will be assessed. However, if the primary outcome is attainment (and there is no natural pretest), then the Review Team Leadership might decide to assess balance on both the math subtest and the verbal subtest.

1. Baseline equivalence of individuals

For studies that must satisfy baseline equivalence of individuals, including cluster-level assignment studies being reviewed for evidence of effects on individuals, the baseline equivalence requirement must be satisfied for the analytic intervention and comparison groups. Pre-intervention measures of the outcome used in the analysis will be acceptable. However, in some cases it would be unusual to observe a baseline measure of some postsecondary outcomes, such as degree attainment. Within the developmental education topic area, reasonable pre-intervention characteristics might encapsulate pre-college traits and events, such as high school GPA, college admission tests, and work experience. These characteristics can be used as proxy pre-intervention variables to assess baseline equivalence within the domain to which they logically belong. For example, high school GPA can be used to establish baseline equivalence for outcomes in the academic achievement domain, and prior work experience can serve as a proxy baseline variable within the labor market domain.

With that background, reviewers should consider two options for baseline equating:

1. The first approach reviewers should take is to assess equivalence using a pre-intervention (baseline) measure of the outcome used in the analysis. If a pre-intervention measure of the outcome used in the analysis is not available, then baseline equivalence must be established on a pre-intervention measure of a proxy variable from within the same domain as the outcome used in the analysis. For example, high school GPA or SAT/ACT scores might be used to establish baseline equivalence for an academic achievement outcome measured in the freshman year.
2. If neither a pre-intervention measure of the outcome nor a proxy measure from the same domain are available, then baseline equivalence must be established on both of the following:
 - A continuously scaled pre-intervention measure of academic achievement. For example, high school GPA or SAT/ACT scores might be used to establish baseline equivalence.

- A pre-intervention measure of student socio-economic status (e.g., FAFSA expected family contribution, family income, high school free- or reduced-price lunch status, parent education levels, Pell grant eligibility) is acceptable for establishing baseline equivalence.

2. Baseline equivalence of clusters

Assessing equivalence of clusters

In general, considerations for satisfying baseline equivalence of individuals also apply to satisfying baseline equivalence of clusters. In particular, baseline equivalence of clusters in the intervention and comparison groups must be satisfied by using the same baseline measures listed above for assessing baseline equivalence of individuals, and the same statistical adjustment requirements apply.

Acceptable samples for demonstrating baseline equivalence of clusters

For this review, any of the following three samples can be used to satisfy the baseline equivalence requirement for the analytic sample of clusters (provided the data are representative of the individuals who were in the clusters at the time the baseline data were collected).

- (a) The analytic sample of the same individuals from any pre-intervention time period.
- (b) Individuals from the same cohort as the individuals in the analytic sample, within the same clusters. The baseline data may be obtained at the time that clusters were assigned to conditions or during the year prior to when clusters were assigned to conditions.
- (c) Individuals from the previous academic year cohort, in the same grade, and within the same clusters, as individuals in the analytic sample.

If authors provide baseline information at multiple time periods, a reviewer should assess baseline equivalence using the information collected at the latest period prior to the start of the intervention. If authors provide baseline information for multiple samples, a reviewer should assess baseline equivalence using the sample listed first in the list above—that is, (a) should be used if available, then (b), and then (c). If authors provide baseline information for multiple samples across multiple time periods, the reviewer should consult review team leadership to determine which information to prioritize.

When a study examines the effectiveness of an intervention in multiple time periods, the sample used to satisfy baseline equivalence of clusters in the base period (for example, the school year after random assignment) also satisfies baseline equivalence of clusters in the later time periods (for example, 2 years after random assignment), so long as the outcome data are representative of the individuals in the clusters.

Statistical Adjustments

The *WWC Procedures Handbook* discusses the types of adjustments made by the WWC in Section VI: Reporting on Findings. For “mismatched” analysis (that is, when a study assigns

units at the cluster level but conducts analysis at the individual level), this topic area uses the WWC default intra-class correlation coefficients of 0.20 for all student achievement outcomes and 0.10 for all behavior outcomes, unless a study-reported intra-class correlation coefficient is available.

PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING THE LITERATURE SEARCH

The *WWC Procedures Handbook, version 4.0*, discusses the procedures for conducting a literature search in Section III: Identifying Relevant Literature and Appendix B: Policies for Searching Studies for Review. For the developmental education topic area, a broad search will be conducted to identify potentially relevant intervention studies, using the search terms identified in Exhibit 1. Content experts will also be asked to identify and recommend interventions with a large body of causal evidence likely to be of interest to decision makers.

The review team will also search the WWC database of previously reviewed studies to identify studies that have met standards in prior reviews. Those studies will be re-reviewed using the eligibility criteria and evidence standards described in this protocol. The team will also identify studies that have been rated as ineligible in prior reviews and will confirm that they are ineligible for this review based on the criteria described in this protocol.

Exhibit 1: Search Terms Used for the Initial Electronic Search

<p>“control group*” or random OR "comparison group*" OR "regression discontinuity" OR "matched group*" OR baseline OR treatment OR experiment OR intervention OR evaluation OR impact OR effectiveness OR causal OR posttest or post-test OR pretest or pre-test OR QED OR RCT OR "propensity score matching" or randomized or quasi-experiment*</p>	<p>AND</p>	<p>developmental OR non-credit OR basic skills OR compensatory OR under achievement OR underachiev* OR remedia* OR corequisite OR co-requisite</p>
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After identifying relevant interventions, the next step is to conduct intervention-specific literature searches, using the intervention name, to identify all publications on each intervention. This review may include additional search terms. The WWC will also supplement the intervention-specific electronic database search with targeted searches of government and non-government agency websites, relevant non-profit organizations that might fund research on developmental education interventions, and via reviewing the bibliographies of literature reviews, meta-analyses, and primary studies of the intervention under review.

In the final step, each citation gathered through this search process will undergo a screening process to determine whether the study meets the eligibility criteria established in the review protocol. This screening process is described in Chapter IV of the *WWC Procedures Handbook*. Finally, the interventions are prioritized for review based on the quantity and quality of eligible studies of the intervention. This prioritization process is described in Appendix A of the *WWC Procedures Handbook*.

Additional Sources

Literature reviews for this topic area involve searching the websites and electronic databases listed in Appendix B of the *WWC Procedures Handbook* as well as the following websites:

- Abt Associates
- American Educational Research Association (AERA)
- American Evaluation Association (AEA)
- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM)
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching
- Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE) at Johns Hopkins University
- Center for Research in Educational Policy (CREP)
- Center for the Study of Higher Education at Berkeley (CSHE)
- Center on Education Policy
- Charles Dana Center at University of Texas-Austin
- Community College Research Center (CCRC)
- Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)
- Cornell Higher Education Research Institute working papers
- Education Commission of the States
- Iowa Reading Research Center
- Mathematica
- MDRC
- National Association for Developmental Education
- National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER)
- National Center for Postsecondary Research
- National Center for Postsecondary Improvement
- National Education Association (NEA)
- Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL)
- Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University
- RAND
- Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness (SREE)
- Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis (CEPA)
- WISCAPE working papers

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