Contact Your Local Parent Center:

Evidence-Based Practices at School: A Guide for Parents

Information for families and Parent Centers

All parents want their children to receive the best education possible. One way to help your child succeed is to know if the school is using effective teaching and intervention practices. But how can schools and parents know if a practice is effective? One method is to see if there is any research or "evidence" to prove that the practice works. This handout explains the meaning of "evidence-based practices" and why they are important. It also lists resources where parents can learn more.

What is an Evidence-Based Practice?

Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) require that schools use programs, curricula, and practices based on "scientifically-based research" "to the extent practicable." This means that whenever possible, the educational interventions being used must be strongly supported by evidence from well-conducted research studies. Educational research may be said to be scientific when it:

- Uses a sound research design. The outcomes of students receiving a tested teaching strategy or intervention are compared to similar students who do not receive the intervention.

- Is based on high quality data analysis. Researchers must be sure to carefully collect, store and examine the data.

- Involves other researchers to review the results. The study should be reported in a journal so other researchers can review the methods used and repeat the research in other settings.

Under IDEA, instruction is individualized based on the student's needs. That's why it is especially important that the knowledge and experience of professionals and parents are also considered when deciding how to teach a student with disabilities. Professionals and parents should know about instructional practices and interventions that have been shown by research to be most effective. These research-based practices should then be matched with a student's unique needs and skills when developing a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). It is important to record what works so that evidence can emerge over time that offers new insights into teaching and learning for students with disabilities.

How Do I Help Ensure My Child is Receiving Evidence-Based Instruction?

If you have questions about an educational practice that is being used with your child, you can ask the teacher or other school staff about the research supporting the practice. As part of the discussion at your child's IEP meeting, it is important to ask whether there is evidence that supports the academic, social and behavioral practices or interventions that are being proposed.

You can also review the websites below when preparing for Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings to find information about different practices being considered.

Where Do I Find Information on Evidence-Based Practices?

The U.S. Department of Education and other agencies and organizations maintain websites and databases with information on evidence-based practices in the field of education:

What Works Clearinghouse: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/
The What Works Clearinghouse is housed at the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. What Works Clearinghouse produces practice guides and reports with recommendations for schools on interventions in various topical areas.

Promising Practices Network: http://www.promisingpractices.net/
The Promising Practices Network provides research-based information on programs and practices that have been shown to be effective in improving the lives of children, including educational outcomes.

The Center for Evidence-Based Practices: http://www.evidencebasedpractices.org/
The Center for Evidence-Based Practices' goal is to bridge the research-to-practice gap in the areas of early childhood education and family support.

Research Basics: http://www.nichcy.org/Research/Basics/Pages/Default.aspx
Research Basics is a collection of articles and resources on understanding educational research and statistics from the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY).

References:

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IDEAs that Work
Office of Special Education Programs