A Research-Practice Partnership Can Help Your State Implement Its ESSA Plans

ESSA Places New Responsibilities on State Leaders to Select Evidence-Based Programs

ESSA places important new responsibilities and opportunities on State Education Agencies (SEAs) for promoting equity and supporting the improvement of teaching and learning in school districts. One important role for SEAs in ESSA implementation is to support school districts in choosing evidence-based programs and practices.

How can a state support its districts in selecting programs and practices? What if there is no research on a program available? What if the available research is not relevant to solving the different challenges states face in education. Many states are also beginning to ask more broadly, “How will we implement the multiple components of our ESSA plan?”

It is a lot to ask leaders to identify programs on their own which best suit their districts and keep track of how implementation can go. These plans are complex and the stakes are high, so it will be essential to bring the resources and expertise needed to support effective implementation.

Research-Practice Partnerships: A Promising Strategy for Addressing Problems in Education

Leveraging a research-practice partnership (RPP) is one way to address the challenges of implementing your state ESSA plan. An RPP brings practitioners, researchers, and communities together to build capacity and work for better teaching and learning and more equitable student outcomes. In an RPP, pressing educational challenges drive research efforts, and researchers devote their expertise to answering educators and communities.

In an RPP, researchers and education leaders work together to find solutions to their problems, relying on the best research evidence available. These partnerships can help leaders make sense of the research and adapt it to their local context. The value of a partnership is that it brings people together who have relevant expertise to solve big problems in education. In a good RPP, education leaders have a researcher they can trust and rely on as a thought partner in solving big problems they are facing.
How a Research-Practice Partnership Can Support ESSA Implementation

RPPs can support SEA leaders with ESSA implementation by helping to:

- Identify evidence-based strategies for school improvement
- Select and validate indicators of school success as required by ESSA
- Select evidence-based programs for English language learners
- Study teacher effectiveness and the teacher pipeline in your state
- Connect rural districts to relevant research on effective instruction
- Adapt an evidence-based program and evaluate its effectiveness

In the past, RPPs have developed effective solutions to problems of implementation, resulting in big improvements to outcomes. For example, the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research worked with Chicago Public Schools to enhance use of its “on track” indicators for high school graduation, resulting in big improvements in graduation rates. That can happen in ESSA, too, if states invest in partnerships to help solve problems of implementation. Now is the time to form partnerships, as states finalize plans and begin to think about how to support their implementation.

Where to Start: Selecting a Good Research Partner

- Identify what you want to learn. Researchers can help to answer a clear question like, “Can our school success indicator reliably distinguish schools that differ in school climate?” or “How easy is it for schools in our state to implement this school turnaround model?”

- Start with people you know and trust. Once you have your question, think about the researchers that people in your state already know and trust. Ask trusted colleagues for recommendations about who might help you answer their questions.

- Reach out. Initiate the conversation by phone or email, even if you don’t know the researcher. Share your question and what you hope to get out of the partnership from the start. Prepare to discuss how the question you have might be of interest to the researcher. Expect that in conversation, your initial question might change, especially as a partnership develops.

- Examine prior work of potential research partners and think about what expertise fits your need. Remember, most researchers specialize in one thing, so you may need to form a partnership with multiple researchers to address the full range of questions you have. Work on a school accountability indicator of school climate is likely to require both expertise in assessment design and in school climate.

- Start small. Negotiate the focus of a small project first, rather than jumping right in to a bigger

Where to Learn More: The RPP Toolkit

Find resources related to starting and maintaining a research-practice partnership here:

http://researchandpractice.org/rpptoolkit