

## Evidence-Based Education Reform

In education, programs and practices gain and lose popularity over time, with little regard to evidence. As a result, important decisions about educational programs are made primarily based on marketing, word of mouth, tradition, and politics. There is a movement in education, however, toward evidence-based reform. This brief gives an overview of the key aspects of evidence-based education reform, and outlines the steps necessary for evidence-based education reform to prevail.

### What is Evidence-Based Education Reform?

Evidence-based education reform is a process of change that uses high-quality evidence from rigorous experiments to guide educational policies and practices. Proponents of evidence-based education reform hold that true progress will take place in education only when: (1) educators and policy makers have a broad set of programs and practices with strong evidence of effectiveness available; and (2) government policies support the use of well-evaluated programs, as well as the development and evaluation of new, promising programs.

### Why is it important?

Evidence-based reform in any area creates a dynamic of progressive improvement, in which researchers and developers work to replace existing methods with even more effective solutions. To increase student achievement, programs and practices used by teachers at all levels need to be improved. This, in turn, requires a focus on research and development to create and rigorously evaluate new approaches capable of making a substantial difference in student outcomes. There is currently limited research evaluating specific educational programs, practices, and materials. As a result, evidence of what works is rarely consequential in educators' decisions. This limitation not only fails to provide the best educational programs to children, but it also removes any incentive for developers to create programs that work better than current practices.

### How do we know it will work?

Evidence-based education reform was founded based on the successful experience of evidence-based medicine, which changed the practice of medicine and the role of research and development within a generation. While evidence-based medicine has not reformed every aspect of medical practice, overall it has resulted in rapid progress on a broad front. In both medicine and education, there are aspects of policy and practice that will always be left up to practitioners' judgment; however, evidence-based reform contributes to informed decision making to increase the likelihood of long-term success.



## What is needed for it to work?

For evidence-based reform to work, the following conditions must exist:

- There must be a **broad range of proven programs** in every area of education, every subject and grade level. Evidence-based policies will not work if demanding strong evidence requires educators to use just one or two proven programs, or if no programs have strong evidence.
- Trusted, impartial, **educator-friendly reviews of research** must be available to enable educators and policy makers to know which specific programs and practices have been proven to work in **rigorous evaluations**.
- There must be **policies to promote use of proven programs**. Government must provide incentives to schools to adopt proven programs.



## How will it be sustainable?

When government policies favor programs with strong evidence, developers—including publishers, software developers, university researchers, and entrepreneurs of all kinds—will have an incentive to engage in serious development and evaluation efforts. Seeing the immediate impact of research and development, policy makers will likely provide substantially greater funding for these activities.

## Who will benefit?

The winners in evidence-based education reform will be children, especially those who are least well served by the current system, teachers who yearn for more effective tools to help them do their job well, and society as a whole, which will come to expect progress in education as confidently as it currently expects progress in other fields.

## Related Reference

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