EVIDENCE-BASED IMPROVEMENT

A Guide for States to Strengthen Their Frameworks and Supports Aligned to the Evidence Requirements of ESSA

**TOOL 4:
LEA GUIDANCE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS**

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Feedback

We welcome your feedback. This tool and the related guide are a first generation set of materials to help states and districts implement ESSA; we hope to revise and improve them based on use in the field. Suggestions of other resources are welcome, as are requests to develop new tools to fill gaps in the field. Access the full guide at:
http://www.wested.org/resources/evidence-based-improvement-essa-guide-for-states

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✐ Tool 4: LEA Guidance for Evidence-Based Interventions

Purpose

To help a local education agency (LEA) define its approach to guiding schools in selecting evidence-based interventions.

Outcome

Completing this tool will result in a clearly defined and well-delineated approach to working with schools to select evidence-based interventions.

Materials

In preparation, gather ESSA requirements and resources that help interpret ESSA requirements that are relevant to your program or department (see section 5 of this guide for some suggested resources); SEA guidance on evidence-based interventions; relevant policy, guidance, and feedback on your LEA's role in school improvement decision-making; and information on capacity and staffing availability.

Who Should Be Involved

LEA staff who oversee school support efforts and interventions should be involved in working through this tool. Those involved should have substantive knowledge of LEA support efforts and requirements. Participants may include multiple staff from one program or department, or, ideally, staff from multiple programs and offices, to support alignment across the LEA. If available, LEA research and evaluation staff with strong quantitative skills would also help inform the approach to selecting evidence-based interventions.

Time

Set aside 1–2 hours for each step, or longer (e.g., 3 or more hours) if multiple programs or departments are working together. This time can be spaced over several weeks, with breaks between steps to reflect or to gather additional information to inform subsequent steps.

Instructions Overview (detailed instructions are provided with each step)

❖ Step 1: Prepare for engaging in this activity with a cross-functional LEA team by organizing the team and materials.

❖ Step 2: Review the ESSA requirements for your specific program or funding stream, and summarize the main points.

❖ Step 3: Reflect on the role and capacity of your LEA in guiding schools to select evidence-based interventions.

❖ Step 4: Using the information that you summarized in previous steps, and some additional considerations, define your LEA's approach to guiding schools in selecting evidence-based interventions.

❖ Step 5: Begin planning by reviewing the results of your discussions and reflections, selecting implementation priorities, and describing next steps.

Leading the Conversation

❖ This tool is designed to help an LEA define only the guidance and support offered to schools in selecting evidence-based interventions—not guidance and support in how to implement and monitor those interventions. Step 2 is a good time to clarify this purpose, so that participants understand the scope of the conversation. Team members may become frustrated if they expect to do more but do not have sufficient time or prompts to accomplish these additional tasks.

❖ Especially if a more prescriptive approach to selecting interventions is chosen, it will be critical to communicate with schools early and often, so that they understand how and why decisions have been made. As part of steps 4 and 5, carefully consider what needs to be communicated, and when and how that information is best shared.

Modifications or Variations

❖ Depending on needs, capacity, and logistical considerations, this tool can be completed by an LEA independently or with SEA support.

❖ It may not be practical or appropriate for all team members to participate in each step or in all parts of a step. In step 1, for example, the organizers or facilitators might determine who will be involved and develop the meeting schedule, but the entire team might work together on gathering and reviewing documentation. Organizers and facilitators will have to determine what works best for their participants in their setting.

❖ Some LEA departments may choose different approaches than other departments, due to variations in ESSA requirements for their funding streams. If so, consider bringing departments together, after completing this tool, to describe the overall LEA approach to supporting schools in selecting evidence-based interventions, and to

determine how the overall and department-specific approaches will be communicated to schools.

STEP 1: Get Organized

Take time to get organized and build your knowledge base by gathering necessary materials and building a well-informed team to complete subsequent steps. Things to consider:

Who is involved? Identify which departments or programs should be represented; then identify the individuals who will participate in this work. What are their respective roles and responsibilities in the group (e.g., note taker, facilitator)?

Department or Program	Name	Contact Information	Role/Responsibility

What do we need to know? Gather and organize documents and other materials related to your LEA's current approach to supporting schools in selecting evidence-based interventions. Review policy guidance, feedback reports, or evaluations on the role and capacity of your LEA and/or department.
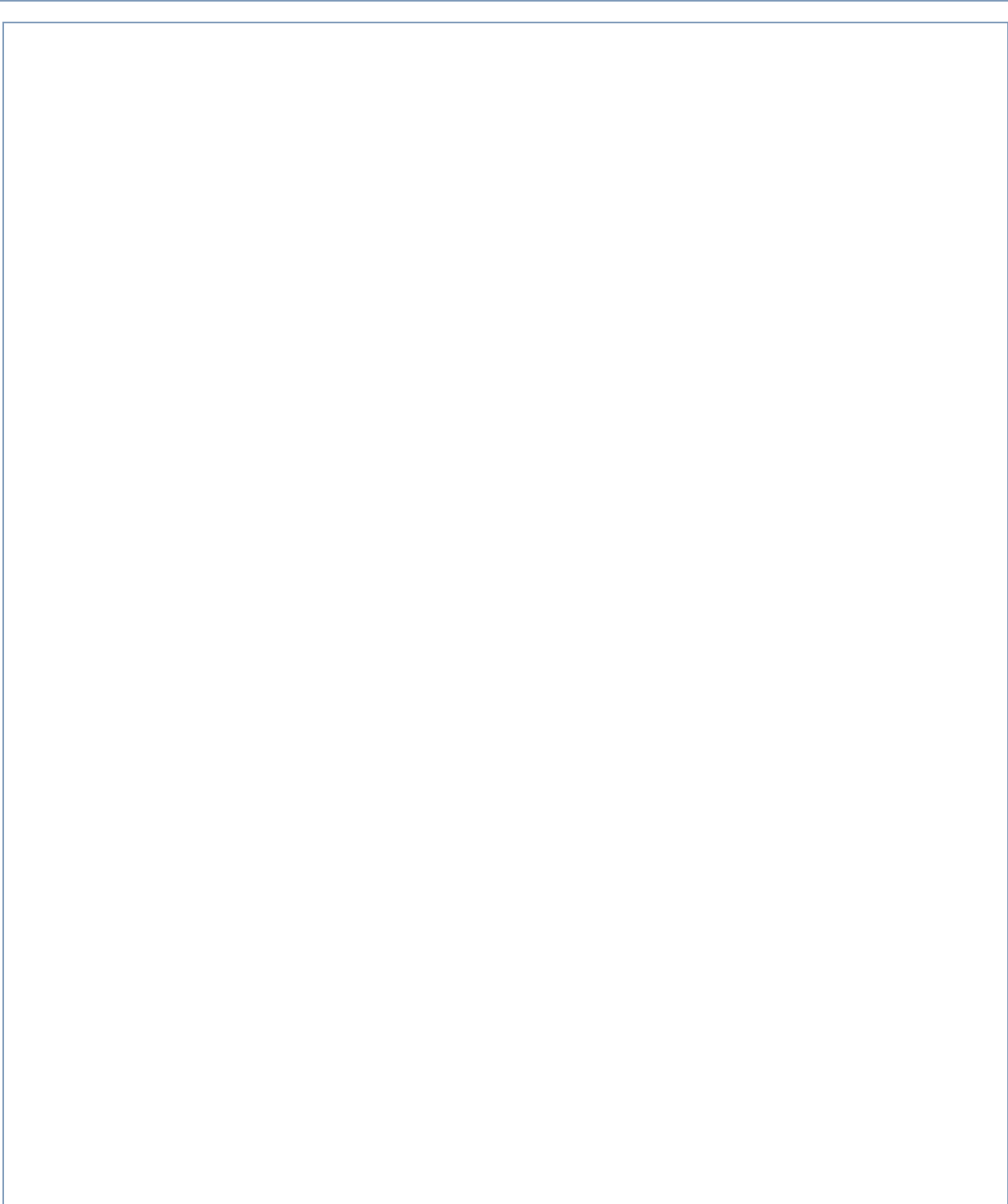
Document or Material (title, description, source)	Why It Is Important (what everyone should know)

Attend to logistics. What will the meeting schedule be? Where will you meet? What materials do you need (e.g., chart paper, sticky notes)?

Notes

STEP 2: Review ESSA Requirements

ESSA calls on LEAs to take an increased role in supporting, managing, and monitoring the implementation of evidence-based decision-making at the local level. This tool is focused on defining an LEA approach to guiding schools' selection of evidence-based interventions. Under SEA guidance, and in alignment with SEA approaches, LEAs can define the level of specificity and prescriptiveness for how schools select these interventions. For example, the LEA might provide a specific list of interventions from which schools must choose, or develop a process for approving schools' decisions, or support an open-ended process to review schools' choices. For additional information related to ESSA provisions, see section 2, and the resources listed in section 5, of this guide.

As you review the ESSA requirements for your specific program or funding stream, consider the following questions:

❖ What element of your program or funding stream requires evidence-based interventions?

❖ What are the situations (e.g., high schools with low graduation rates) that trigger evidence-based interventions?

❖ What level of evidence is required for interventions in your program or funding stream?

❖ What is required in terms of SEA review and approval of plans for your program or funding stream? What are the implications for your LEA's role and capacity?

Review and Summarize the ESSA Requirements and SEA Guidance

STEP 3: Reflect on Your LEA's Role and Capacity to Engage with Schools

What skills or knowledge do your LEA staff possess to guide schools, with SEA support, in the process of selecting evidence-based interventions? What does your team need to consider about roles and capacity before defining an approach for selecting evidence-based interventions? Note that capacity encompasses a number of dimensions, from human capacity (Do you have the people to do it?) to organizational capacity (Do you have the processes and structures to guide this work?) and material capacity (Do you have the technology and necessary materials to support the work?). The following questions are intended to help guide your conversation with your SEA and LEA colleagues to determine your approach.

LEA Role

❖ How does our LEA's past practice or policy regarding the degree of centralized or local control impact how we choose to work with schools to select evidence-based interventions?

❖ How prescriptive do we want to be as a district? How prescriptive is our SEA?

❖ What authority does our LEA have under state laws, policies, and regulations?

❖ What have our past approaches to providing guidance to schools been? What would we like to keep or change about how we approach providing guidance to schools? What changes do we need to make to align with ESSA requirements?
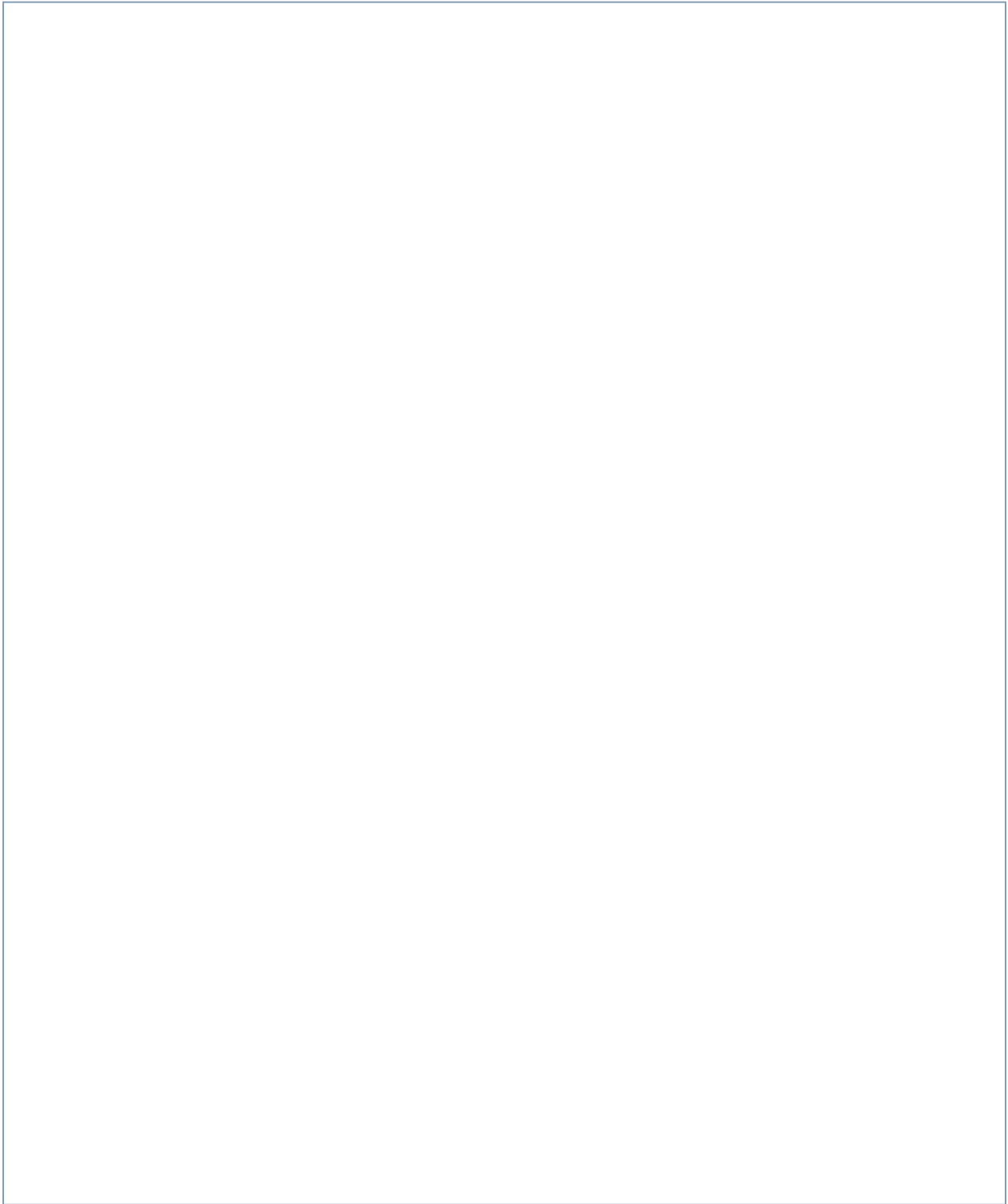
LEA Capacity

❖ What is our LEA's capacity to conduct or review research on, and to assess evidence-based interventions? What resources outside of the LEA (e.g., SEA, Regional Educational Laboratory, county office of education, outside organizations) can support these efforts?

❖ What is our LEA's capacity to approve schools' approaches and to determine how those approaches fit within SEA guidelines?

❖ What is our LEA's capacity to provide technical assistance to schools on selecting evidence-based interventions? How is our capacity influenced by SEA processes?

❖ What is our LEA's capacity to monitor schools' evidence-based intervention selection processes? How is our capacity influenced by SEA processes?

Summarize Your Reflection on the Role and Capacity of Your LEA.

STEP 4: Define Your LEA's Approach

Considering the role and capacity of your LEA in selecting evidence-based interventions, what will your approach be under ESSA? Consider the following questions:

Clarify Your Approach

- ❖ Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind, what was our approach to guidance on selecting research-based or evidence-based interventions? What lessons did we learn about that approach that can be applied to our ESSA approach?

- ❖ How does our specific program or funding stream shape our approach?

- ❖ How does the timeline for planning or implementation within our specific program or funding stream affect our approach?

- ❖ Can additional information from our summaries in previous steps of this tool be used to influence how we will design our approach?

- ❖ How does the SEA approach influence our LEA approach?

- ❖ Under what conditions would we differentiate our approach for schools?

Clarify your support

- ❖ What kinds of support will our LEA provide to help schools make local decisions around evidence-based interventions?

- ❖ How will we describe our approach to schools? How will we describe it to other departments within the LEA? How will we describe it to the SEA?

- ❖ What will our LEA produce to guide schools? A list of interventions to choose from, a guidance document that shares the criteria that the LEA will use to vet schools' plans, or something else? How will SEA guidance and/or materials shape our guidance materials?

- ❖ What kinds of support will our LEA provide to help schools make local decisions around evidence-based interventions? How does this support reflect SEA support and guidance?

- ❖ What resources—staffing, funding, and training—will be needed for following through on and sustaining our proposed approach?

- ❖ What are our immediate next steps?

Summarize Your LEA's Approach to Guiding Schools in Selecting Evidence-based Interventions.

STEP 5: Plan Next Steps

Review the results of your discussions and reflections, select implementation priorities, and describe next steps.

Implementation Priorities

Next Steps