

## EBITE RESOURCE GUIDE RG02b ESSA Level 3 and 4 Interventions

### Purpose

This Resource Guide describes ESSA Level 3 and Level 4 interventions. According to the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA; PUBLIC LAW 114–95, DEC. 10, 2015), Level 3 interventions are those that have “*promising evidence from at least 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias.*” Level 4 interventions are those that “*demonstrate a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes.*” We discuss Levels 3 and 4 together because in databases that do not refer to ESSA Levels of Evidence, it is often not clear which level applies to an intervention being considered for implementation in a new school, classroom or setting. What Level 3 and 4 interventions have in common is the lack of experimental or quasi-experimental evidence. For a useful crosswalk of how ESSA levels/tiers of evidence relate to evidence criteria of a number of clearinghouses, see [Aligning Evidence-based Clearinghouses with the ESSA Tiers of Evidence](#) from REL Midwest (2018).

### How to Use this Guide

Use this Resource Guide to get a full understanding of the kind of research evidence ESSA Level 3 and 4 interventions have, how educators may determine if an intervention could be considered as Level 3 or 4, and how to decide if they are appropriate for your needs.

### What are ESSA Level 3 and 4 Interventions?

Level 1: Strong Evidence

Level 2: Moderate Evidence

Level 3: Promising Evidence

Level 4: Demonstrates a Rationale

Interventions that are characterized as ESSA Levels 3 or 4 typically do not have as strong a research base as interventions at ESSA Levels 1 or 2. Level 3 and 4 interventions could still favorably influence student outcomes, but educators should recognize that there isn’t the same degree or amount of evidence in support of student change or impact as there is with Level 1 and 2 interventions. The REL Midwest Brief (2019) on [ESSA Tiers of Evidence: What](#)

[You Need to Know](#) provides additional information and a video to help practitioners and researchers make sense of the evidence quality criteria for each level.

For example, Level 3 interventions may be based on an evaluation of an intervention without a comparison condition. In such a design, student test scores may have improved from pretest to post-test for students using that intervention, but without a comparison against students *not* using that intervention, the evaluators cannot claim with confidence that improvement was *caused* by the intervention, only that the intervention was *associated* with better scores.

Level 3 and 4 interventions are often derived from multidisciplinary basic science on child development, education, human behavior, mental health, psychology, social psychology,

sociology, motivation, risk and resilience, and other areas. Examples of specific theories that might support the interventions are social learning theory, cognitive behavioral theory, ecological systems theory, cognitive theories, stereotype theory, self-determination theory, and teaching and learning theories.

According to ESSA, Level 4 interventions require a [Logic Model](#) (see EBITE Resource Guide 13 for examples and descriptions) that clearly links how the theory and activities of the intervention or practice connects to the desired change in student outcomes. In addition, implementation of an intervention should include the use of appropriate measures and metrics for monitoring progress and outcomes. Although only the definition of ESSA Level 4 interventions refers to theory and logic models, Level 3 interventions have these foundations as do Level 1 and 2 interventions.

It is also important to examine the research or study characteristics supporting Level 3 and 4 interventions for match or adaptability to your student population and intervention context. Level 3 and 4 interventions are good choices in many practical situations if they address the intervention need. They allow for educator creativity in meeting the needs of their own students while relying on existing research and program theory and logic.

## Resources

Ohio Department of Education has created a comprehensive guide focusing on Level 4: [Empowered by Evidence: Using Level 4 Evidence-based Strategies](#).

Institute of Education Sciences Video (5:46) explaining the four ESSA tiers of evidence and how schools and districts can utilize them to assess interventions: [Understanding the ESSA Tiers of Evidence](#)

REL Midwest (2018) *Aligning Evidence-based Clearinghouses with the ESSA Tiers of Evidence*: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/pdf/eventhandout/ESSA-Clearinghouse-Crosswalk-Jan2018-508.pdf>

REL Midwest (2019). Research Brief describing ESSA Tiers [Levels] of Evidence and their determining factors: [ESSA Tiers of Evidence: What You Need to Know](#)