

# knowledge alliance

*Members of Knowledge Alliance (KA) are pleased to provide examples of how they are supporting State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) in implementing evidence-based strategies that align with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) evidence requirements, including towards COVID-19 recovery. Additionally, KA members have provided reports from the field on American Rescue Plan (ARP) implementation and ESEA accountability and assessment challenges. We have provided the KA member examples below in alphabetical order.*

## Examples of how KA members are supporting States' LEAs

### **American Institutes for Research (AIR)**

To inform decision making related to providing targeted and differentiated supports to students post-COVID, REL Midwest, which is operated by AIR, partnered with the **Illinois State Board of Education** to conduct a study that examined student learning changes that occurred as schools shifted, specifically, how student learning in mathematics and reading changed, and how changes to student learning varied by student characteristics and district size. Read the full report and find the related infographic [here](#).

REL Midwest, in partnership with the **Ohio Department of Education**, created a [toolkit](#) with a step-by-step guide for districts that want to (1) learn where learning changes may have occurred during COVID school closures; (2) understand how to use that knowledge to inform decision making; and (3) identify next steps for future analysis and planning.

Additionally, REL Midwest has produced a series of [blog posts](#) summarizing strategies for using educational technology and teaching young children, English learners and students with disabilities in a remote environment. In 2020, AIR also hosted a [series of webinars](#) focused on remote learning and stakeholder needs.

### **Curriculum Associates**

Curriculum Associates reports that they are fielding requests from States for assistance in finding and implementing evidence-based practice that align with ESSA evidence requirements. In addition, Curriculum Associates reports that most States are providing LEAs with a rubric, with assistance from research organizations, to help them evaluate programs for evidence that may not be listed on the [Evidence for ESSA](#) website (E4E) or in the [What Works Clearinghouse](#) (WWC). These rubrics are helping districts evaluate new and innovative programs or initiatives that would not otherwise be readily available, given the review process for inclusion on E4E or WWC may take a long time.

### **Education Development Center (EDC)**

The **Boston Public Schools** (BPS) Office of Data and Accountability requested REL Northeast and Islands' (REL-NEI), which is operated by EDC, help to develop resources that school leaders and classroom teachers could implement as part of their ESSER-funded programs. Following an in-depth literature review, REL-NEI helped BPS create research summaries to highlight evidence-based school-wide and classroom strategies to address the impacts on

learning from the pandemic in six key areas: (1) high-quality pathways; (2) equitable access; (3) multilingual learning; (4) inclusion; (5) community partnerships; and (6) school environments. REL-NEI also helped BPS develop one-page summaries of general evidence-based strategies in four additional areas: (1) high-dosage tutoring; (2) mental health; (3) social and emotional learning; and (4) effective professional development. As a result of this work, BPS staff have been able to provide clear, evidence-based interventions to support student recovery and inform funding allocation.

### **Education Northwest**

REL Northwest, which is operated by Education Northwest, fielded a request from executive leaders at the **Idaho State Department of Education** (ISDE) to support their work in the lowest-performing schools in the State, specifically the current cohort of Idaho's Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools identified under their ESSA plan. REL Northwest has provided training activities to assist the schools as they revise and monitor progress toward their school improvement goals and has helped to align evidence-based supports to needs the schools have identified using their data. REL-Northwest also provided a training series to train ISDE staff members on key evidence-based principles for designing effective professional learning for teachers.

The Region 17 Comprehensive Center (CC), also operated by Education Northwest, supports **Idaho** and **Montana** and has provided [various COVID-19 resources](#) to stakeholders including a [webinar](#) and [infographic](#) on strengthening ARP preparation and implementation, a [guide](#) that helps school districts engage in meaningful and productive conversations about how ARP funds can be used to address students' academic and social emotional needs, and two blogs on [Monitoring Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ESSER\) Fund Plans](#) and [Designing Locally Relevant Plans to Support Learning Recovery](#).

### **Education Testing Service (ETS)**

The Region 3 Comprehensive Center (R3CC), which is operated by ETS, helped **Puerto Rico's** SEA write their ESSER III plan and provided advice on what to use the funding for, which included assistance in the areas of professional development and school improvement. Additionally, the R3CC plans to lead a training for the staff on professional development opportunities that meet the four levels of ESSA evidence. R3CC is also working closely with the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Puerto Rico Education Support (PRES) Team to guide the **Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDOE)** in implementing their COVID-19 Relief Funds.

### **Learning Forward**

Since March 2020, Learning Forward has led the [Virtual Teaching, Leading and Learning \(ViTLL\) webinar](#) series which focuses on providing real-time, experience-based support to teachers and leaders working in constantly changing circumstances. The webinars feature practitioners currently working in districts/schools who share expertise on a variety of topics, act as platforms to share free and accessible resources for a wide range of practitioners and build community and encourage active conversation and resource sharing among attendees. Currently, the webinars focus on reopening, recovery and reinvention post-pandemic and highlight how high-quality professional learning provides educators with relevant and flexible support. The strategies, data and lessons learned from these webinars are helping to inform Learning Forward's post-COVID policy agenda for professional learning.

### **Marzano Research**

REL Central, operated by Marzano Research, worked with **Nebraska** stakeholders to develop a resource inventory of evidence-based strategies and programs for reading and mathematics, distilled from WWC Practice Guides. These resource inventories for [math](#) and [reading](#) are available on the **Nebraska Department of Education** website. REL Central also partnered with the Nebraska Department of Education to provide training statewide to support the use of the evidence-based practices.

REL Central published a series of [COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions documents](#), resources, memos and recorded webinars that addressed critical issues such as tracking attendance, assessing students and engaging American Indian/Alaska Native families.

REL Central also conducted a [descriptive study](#) to help SEA leaders in **Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wyoming** understand proposed strategies in districts' remote learning plans to ensure continuity and better support remote learning in their States.

### **Results for America (RFA)**

RFA operates a [State Education Fellowship](#) program that brings together senior evaluation and program leaders from a variety of SEAs into a single network focused on accelerating the generation and use of evidence. Through this program, RFA is supporting SEA leaders to:

- Understand definitions and requirements associated with evidence-based strategies;
- Share resources, strategies and solutions to common challenges, all designed to increase the use of evidence-based strategies at the SEA and LEA levels;
- Improve alignment across strategic priorities, funding, data systems and data use to accelerate the use and impact of evidence-based strategies; and
- Make the case for evidence-use and evidence-building as a strategy for increasing equitable access and outcomes at both the SEA and LEA levels.

RFA has partnered with Brown University's Annenberg Institute to create [EDResearch for Recovery](#), which provides a library of evidence briefs that offer actionable insights to help SEA and LEA leaders make informed, student-centered decisions about which evidence-based COVID-19 recovery strategies will work best in their schools and communities. The briefs cover a range of topics including how to address learning loss, how to accelerate student learning with high dosage tutoring and how to design high-quality summer learning programs.

Additionally, RFA runs a number of district networks focused on supporting the design, implementation, measurement and continuous improvement of evidence-based recovery strategies. The most mature networks are in **Rhode Island** (focused on high-dosage tutoring) and **Tennessee** (focused on summer learning programs). These networks were built in direct response to implementation challenges observed from using COVID-19 funds and are designed to create venues for decision-makers to identify and engage on crucial areas and to learn about potential research-driven approaches before piloting specific high-leverage strategies.

### **RMC Research Corporation (RMC)**

RMC is working with the National Comprehensive Center to set up Communities of Practice for SEA teams in three areas:

- Using ARP funds for scale and impact through the use of evidence-based strategies
- Implementing school improvement strategies through an equity lens—which employs the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) work on monitoring equity/opportunity-to-learn indicators and includes strategies that are evidence based
- Planning for summer/extended learning which will draw from evidence-based practices where they exist

Additionally, the National Comprehensive Center is setting up several work groups with Regional CCs to help them address these topics with SEAs.

RMC has also developed [a tool](#) created at the National Comprehensive Center to help SEAs review and monitor ARP plans for ESSER funds that incorporate literacy.

### **WestEd**

REL West and Comprehensive Center Regions 2, 13, and 15, operated by WestEd, have provided 8 workshops to approximately 570 State, regional, district and school staff on selecting and measuring evidence-based strategies using ARP funds. The ten States impacted by this work include **Arizona, the Bureau of Indian Education, California, Connecticut, Nevada, Oklahoma, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island and Utah**. The primary focus of each event has been to help SEAs develop strategies to support LEAs in using their ARP funds to address high-priority needs and select evidenced-based strategies. REL West has also taken the lead in offering considerations to each SEA leadership team about how to measure progress and outcomes from implementing these strategies. REL West has grounded this work in WestEd's [Evidence-Based Improvement Guide](#), among other REL West tools.

WestEd notes that initial feedback from stakeholders who participated in these workshops have been quite positive. All respondents to the post-event surveys agreed or strongly agreed that from participating in the events, they have greater capacity to use research on selecting evidence-based practices to inform decisions about policies or practices, to use data on measuring the effectiveness of evidence-based practices to inform decisions about policies or practices in their agency, and to support districts/LEAs with evidence-based practices.

### **ARP Implementation and Impact Challenges: Reports from the Field**

*Some KA members note that SEAs and LEAs understand the value of investing ARP ESSER funds in evidence-based strategies and have access to and a good understanding of evidence-based recovery strategies. However, they report some notable gaps and opportunities for implementation. These strategies include:*

**General Support Measuring Implementation and Impact:** States and districts are largely investing in the right strategies but are facing a series of challenges in implementing and measuring the impact of evidence-based strategies. Specifically, States and districts need support to:

- Develop valid and practical common implementation measures that help surface early evidence of impact;

- Identify and use available data to surface early evidence of impact and tell stories that can help illuminate and share strong implementation practices;
- Understand how to select the evaluation models and data sources that are most appropriate for different programs or initiatives;
- Balance the urgent need to implement evidence-based interventions with the need for proactive, longer-term measurement and evaluation planning; and
- Effectively communicate with State leaders and other stakeholders about reasonable short- and long-term outcomes of interventions.

**Building Internal Research Capacity:** Few States have dedicated research teams with the capacity to carry out the evidence- and evaluation-related requirements included in ARP. Where States do have dedicated research teams, those teams are often underfunded and/or understaffed. SEAs continue to need additional internal capacity to support the use of evidence-based strategies and to engage in state-level evaluation activities.

**Data Analytic Support for LEAs:** Pre-pandemic, SEAs recognized that many LEAs needed additional support in engaging in the data analytics, research and local evaluation work that underpins the use of evidence-based strategies. The need to build LEAs' capacity has only increased with the ARP evidence-base and evaluation requirements and SEAs need additional support, guidance and resources as they help LEAs build that capacity.

**Use of Evidence-Based Strategies:** While SEA ARP plans speak on using money for evidence-based strategies, only a few States prescribe what those should entail. It is critical to support this planning work as LEAs begin to use ARP funding.

**Assessment and Student Enrollment Challenges:** KA members have shared that SEAs and LEAs are struggling to figure out what students are currently in schools and how attendance has changed with the pandemic. They are unsure how to interpret assessment results where dramatic changes have occurred.

Additionally, KA members have raised that SEAs are unsure how to comply with Federal reporting requirements where there are data gaps. Many States are trying to figure out how to use and interpret assessment and other accountability data where gaps occur while also attempting to comply and get back on track with Federal transparency and reporting requirements

## A Note from KA Members on Assessment and Accountability

**2021-2022 Assessment Plans:** KA members, like Cognia, shared that all the States they support in administering ESEA-required Statewide assessments intend to move forward with full assessment administration this school year in the same manner as pre-COVID-19.

**ESEA Accountability Requirements:** States are feeling pressure to resume accountability designations for schools (Comprehensive and Targeted Support and Intervention Schools – CSI/TSI/A-TSI). Many States are discussing, for the 2021-2022 school year, implementing a “provisional” identification. They don’t want to continue identifying the same schools that have been held “frozen” for the past two school years and want a fresh look, but they don’t want to fully identify new schools with the accompanying consequences. The provisional identification of CSI/TSI/A-TSI would hold for one year, and the next school year (2022-2023) the State would reexamine data from these schools to see if the identification holds. If it does, the schools would go into improvement status. Many States feel this transitional system will be more fair and help account for missing data before a more permanent label is affixed to a school. The new ED Accountability FAQs seem to allow for this type of temporary designation.

**Statewide Interim Benchmark Assessment Systems:** Many States are exploring a move to a Statewide interim benchmark test to be used for assessment and accountability purposes. Several tests, administered over the course of the school year, would be combined into a summative score at the end of the year and be used for accountability. States feel these could be more directly relevant to teaching and learning while still meeting Federal requirements. Interest in these tests is growing dramatically and many have asked KA members, like Cognia, for support in developing these systems.

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