



Elementary & Middle Schools
Technical Assistance Center
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A Guide for Education Personnel: Selecting an Intervention or Program

“You have to drill through mud and water to get oil, you have to sift through sand and silt to get gold, you have to chop and hack through stone to get diamonds – so why do so many people feel that the treasure of ideas should come with little or no effort?”

~ Sydney J. Harris ~

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Choosing Technical Assistance Interventions and Programs

Goal: To help school professionals identify criteria through which they can determine the appropriateness of an intervention for implementation within their school.



Why is this Information Important?

School professionals often hear claims from product salespeople that their products or programs will positively affect student outcomes. Product developers tout that their products are the classroom panacea, and flood education professionals with written materials and brochures. These interventions or programs may offer education professionals the hope that the program will enhance student learning, and will lead to increased student success. As you, the educator, review the vast amount of products, materials, and programs that cross your desk, it is helpful to have the information and tools that enable you to make an informed decision regarding the appropriateness, or "best fit" between an intervention and the needs of your school and setting. In an education environment, in which personnel and fiscal resources are scarce, it is important to find cost-effective, yet quality-driven solutions to enhance student learning outcomes. The inappropriateness or "lack of fit" between an intervention and the needs of a school district are costly in terms of personnel and fiscal resources, and most importantly, costly for the students for whom the intervention or program was directed.

A structured and systematic procedure can help district personnel assess the viability of a particular intervention or program and determine its appropriateness for their district. The evaluation criteria indicated in this product are not intended to be exhaustive of all of the factors that district personnel should consider when evaluating the viability of a specific intervention/program. However, these variables can serve as a template – a foundation – to facilitate thinking regarding the advantages or disadvantages of a particular school-based or district-wide strategy.

The Prerequisites

Before you can confidently make a decision about whether a specific intervention or program is appropriate for your setting, you must have a thorough understanding of the needs, resources, and capacity of your setting. You may want to use an established model (such as Havelock's Change Process Model) to help you structure your efforts to implement and sustain an innovation.

As indicated by Havelock's Model, the steps of caring, relating, and examining, should precede any

Havelock Change Process

1. *Care* - develop a sense of concern.
2. *Relate* - build relationships.
3. *Examine* - understand problem - establish objectives.
4. *Acquire* - access resources.
5. *Try* - move from knowledge to action.
6. *Extend* - gain wider acceptance of change.
7. *Renew* - continuous improvement.

(Based upon the change agent process, Havelock, 1995)

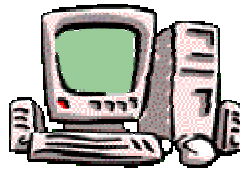
activities related to acquiring and trying resources (Havelock, 1995). Going through the steps of developing concern, building relationships, and examining the problem will facilitate your ability to identify intervention features and characteristics that are important for your setting. Information about the needs, resources, and capacity within your setting can help you make an informed decision about the interventions and programs that you need to acquire.

Where to Find Information about Programs and Interventions

Informational Sources

- Conferences
- Workshops
- Vendor Fairs
- Education Journals
- Internet Search
- Listservs
- Colleagues
- Professional Associations
- State/Federal Department of Special Education
- Public and private agencies that fund research on new interventions.

There are many resources through which you can find information about specific programs or interventions. Some resources such as discussing programs with



colleagues, subscribing to educational Listservs, and searching the Internet, may be more accessible than others, such as attending

vendor fairs and conferences. Even though you may not be able to attend events, you may be able to obtain a conference program or session abstracts to learn more about the content of the

meeting. Visit the website of the conference host to learn whether resource information is available. If you are unable to leave your site, you can communicate with others by telephone, email and through the Internet. Some school districts, nearby associations, and local higher education organizations may be able to assist by offering video-conferencing capabilities. Gathering information can be time consuming - but it can also be fun. The time you invest in gathering information, and selecting the appropriate program or intervention for your site will save you time once the program is implemented. Also, by evaluating multiple programs or interventions, you get a broader sense of what is available to you and what will best suit your needs.

A Process for Deciding the Appropriateness of a Program

Deciding whether a particular program or intervention is appropriate for your school or district can be a daunting task. However, the consequence of implementing a school-wide or district-wide program or intervention that is not consistent with your needs, culture or philosophy is even more daunting. A systematic procedure can make this evaluation phase easier and can result in high quality outcomes for your students:



Here are some steps....

1. Acquire Information: Acquire an overview of the program/intervention in writing from the publisher, developer, or other external resources. Ask the developer if evaluation data are included in this overview material and whether case studies that exemplify the use of the program/intervention are available. If possible, acquire the names and contact information for districts that are currently using the intervention to serve as a reference.



2. Obtain References: Contact school districts that have experience using this intervention. Use the personnel resource network that you have developed to learn about districts that have had positive and negative experiences with the intervention.

3. Observe Program: Observe the program/intervention first-hand through a site visit or through video. Keep in mind that some programs may use materials or resources that are not necessary for the characteristics of your program.



4. Analyze Information: Analyze the quantitative and qualitative evaluative data available through the program developer. Complement these data with data you obtain through independent resources such as school districts that are using the intervention, results of independent studies cited in literature, and federally funded projects and studies.

Questions to Guide the Selection of an Intervention

As you collect information about a specific program or intervention, it is helpful to use questions to organize and prioritize the information you collect. These questions can relate to a variety of domains including the research and studies; implementing the intervention; and resources. We offer the following framework to help guide your effort to organize the information that you obtain regarding a program or intervention.

Questions related to Research and Studies



It is helpful to conduct a literature review of current research related to the intervention or program you are considering. Through an extensive search of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, you can acquire articles and publications that reflect research conducted in the field. When reading and reviewing these materials, it may be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have research and data from studies that focus on evaluating the impact of the intervention or program?

- Do the findings from studies provide descriptive information and outcome data from studies that were conducted in similar settings as mine?
- Do the studies clearly define the independent variables (what is being manipulated in the study - or what the treatment is - such as differing reading programs or different kinds of instructional grouping techniques)? Are these the same variables that describe the intervention I want to implement?
- Do the studies clearly define dependent variables (outcomes or what you want to measure such as reading levels, or behavioral incidents)? Are these dependent variables the same variables that I want impacted by the intervention under consideration?
- Do the studies use large sample sizes - or was the intervention evaluated using a small number of subjects?
- Were conditions in the study similar to the ones in my setting? For instance, if a study evaluated the effectiveness of a specific reading intervention and the study was conducted in classrooms that utilized a collaborative teaching model, do I have these same conditions and resources available to me?
- Do the studies contain outcome data for students with disabilities who are similar to the students I serve? For example, did the studies include students with disabilities who are culturally or linguistically diverse or English language learners with disabilities?

Questions Related to Implementing the Intervention



Information about the origin of a program can be useful in determining whether the intervention has a successful history. Information about the development of the intervention can help you determine whether the settings in which the program was developed were similar to your setting. For instance, if a for-profit corporation developed a character education program in a small, private school, this program may not be a good fit for a large, diverse urban school that would require purchasing several hundred copies of the curriculum. Primarily, the program was developed in a setting in which the students were probably very different from the students in your setting. Secondly, if the developer is interested in earning money (and this is common within the education community), you should ask if you are getting the most return for your investment? The following questions will help you think about issues related to implementing the program:

- What are the historical origins of the intervention/program – how long has the program been around?
- Who developed the intervention or program? Do you have information regarding what circumstances surrounded its development?
- How pervasive is this intervention or program? How widely is the intervention used – in what kinds of settings does the intervention appear most suited? Are the settings in which the program is widely used similar to mine? Factors to consider include: demographics of students to which the intervention is targeted, size of school or district, resources needed to successfully implement the program.

- What kind of training and inservice is required to implement and maintain the intervention? Does the developer provide external support? What are the costs associated with this support?
- How much flexibility do we have in implementing the intervention?

Questions Related to Resources

Professional development specialists and those persons who select interventions and programs are concerned about the resources necessary to acquire, implement, maintain, and evaluate the program. These questions can be considered when you are comparing the resource needs of the program and the resource capacity of your school or district:



- How much does the intervention or program cost? Are there costs associated with both implementation and maintenance?
- What are the personnel and staffing resource needs of the intervention/program?
- How much time (contracted or volunteers) will staff be required to give?
- Are additional materials needed to implement the program?
- If we implement this program, will resources be taken from another program or area - or will another area or school need be compromised because of the resources devoted to this program?

Conclusion



We hope this product has helped you think about factors, issues and concerns related to the selection of school or district-wide interventions and programs.

With a careful selection process in place, you and your district can balance the needs of your site with the characteristics of a specific program or intervention. The *Choosing Technical Assistance Interventions and Programs Scale* included in this packet will help you systematically organize the information you obtain regarding the characteristics of an intervention and can help you make judgements about the features of programs that are important to you. The scale can also be used to facilitate your ability to rank each intervention and product based on its features, capabilities, and characteristics. We have also included references in this product and resources where you can go to obtain additional information regarding selecting technical assistance interventions and programs.

Every setting is unique and the criteria that a professional will use to determine the appropriateness of an intervention will vary. This product is not an exhaustive list of the factors that may impact upon your decision to select a program. As is the case in almost any sector, or any industry, caveat emptor or buyer beware - be an informed consumer.

Choosing Technical Assistance Interventions and Programs Scale

Name of Program/Intervention: _____

This scale is designed to help you organize the research you have conducted regarding a specific program or intervention and can help you use your findings to rate programs and interventions according to the characteristics that you deem important in your setting. The scale will help ensure that you have considered the elements necessary to determine whether an intervention or program fits the needs of your setting. Fill out the scale for each new intervention or program you are considering implementing within your site.

Directions: Using a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = least true, 5 = most true), rank your answers to each of the statements contained in the scale. When you have answered all of the statements, total your responses and compare the total score from each intervention or program. Interventions or programs that yield the highest score may be the best fit for your school or district.

<i>Evidence of Effectiveness Based on Practice</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
1. The other schools or districts currently using this intervention or program are similar to my school or district.						
2. The other schools or districts currently using this intervention or program cited benefits that will help me solve some of the target issues I have identified.						
3. When I visited or viewed a video of a site using this intervention or program, I could see how it was effective in targeting the issue I am trying to solve.						
4. The intervention is used and recommended by professionals in the field.						
5. There is sufficient evidence to show that this intervention or program will be an effective means of serving the diverse population of students in my school or district.						

<i>Evidence of Effectiveness based on Practice (continued)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
6. The teachers and administrators I am targeting are prepared to implement this intervention or program.						
7. The design of this intervention or program will not alter the structure of the schools or district I am targeting in negative ways.						
8. The changes facilitated by this intervention or program are manageable and/or gradual.						
<i>Evidence of Effectiveness based on Research</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
9. The research data I used to learn more about this intervention or program included well defined independent and dependent variables, sample size, experimental controls, statistical process and methodology, and qualitative information.						
10. The qualitative and quantitative data concerning this project show high rates of success with populations similar to those I am targeting.						
11. The qualitative data concerning this project emphasized programmatic success with students similar to those in the school or district I serve.						
12. The methodology used provides statistically valid information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Appropriate sample size ➤ Dependent variables are related to independent variables 						
13. The intervention or program has shown consistent success over a period of time.						
14. The intervention or program was developed to address issues similar to mine.						

15. The developers of this intervention or program are experts in the field and have added to the knowledge base which teachers in the schools I serve have used or supported.						
16. The developers of this intervention or program have similar philosophies to the teachers who will be implementing it.						
17. Data show that this intervention or program positively affects teaching and learning in the classroom.						
18. This intervention or program is designed to improve student success as shown through tangible results (informal and formal assessments).						
<i>Indicators related to Intervention Characteristics</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
19. The fiscal costs of implementing and maintaining this intervention or program are within my school's or district's budgetary means.						
20. The schools or districts I serve have enough staff/personnel to implement and maintain this intervention or program.						
21. My school or district will have flexibility when implementing this intervention.						
22. The intervention or program includes initial training for the school or district personnel who will be implementing it.						

23. This intervention or program has a support system I can refer to if I ever have questions or need help problem-solving issues.						
24. The activities and events that need to be put in place to implement the selected design are accessible and manageable.						

References and Resources

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Web Based Resources

ERIC Digests

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/index

Guide to the United States Department of Education Programs and Resources

<http://web99.ed.gov/GTEP/Program2.nsf>

OSEP Sponsored Web Sites

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/links.html>

Searching the OSEP Discretionary Grant Projects Database

<http://www.cc.sped.org/database/search.htm>