

Hierarchy of Evidence of Program Effectiveness

Strong Evidence

Programs shown in well-conducted randomized controlled trials, carried out in typical community settings, to produce sizable, sustained effects on important life outcomes, such as reading and math proficiency, high school graduation, college enrollment and persistence, employment and earnings, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, or criminal arrests. Strong evidence generally includes a requirement for replication – i.e., the demonstration of such effects in two or more trials conducted in different implementation sites, or, alternatively, in one large multi-site trial.

Promising Evidence

Programs that have been evaluated in randomized controlled trials or rigorous quasi-experimental studies, and found to have positive effects that are sizable but not yet conclusive (e.g., due to only short-term follow-up, a single-site study design, use of highly-similar comparison groups but not randomization, or effects that fall short of statistical significance).

Preliminary Evidence

Programs that are backed by data showing they can be successfully delivered, in adherence to a well-defined protocol, in real-world implementation settings (e.g., public schools, police departments, community health clinics); and that have compelling logic or initial studies (correlational, quasi-experimental, or similar) suggesting the potential to produce sizable effects on important outcomes.