



Building on what works: Improving children's futures

Improving children's health and development requires strong partnerships, sustainable financing, and the ability to match children's needs to proven programmes, says [Jessica Ripper](#) and [Abel Ortiz](#)

RESEARCH HAS IDENTIFIED A NUMBER of critical milestones that predict success in school. For example, children who enter school ready to learn, have a strong attendance record, and are proficient readers by age 8 are more likely to do well. However, academic success also depends on a child's

ability to reach non-academic milestones, such as regulating their behaviour and interacting positively with their peers.

Evidence2Success: Improving Our Children's Futures is a new project developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and several partners, in the US. It aims

to improve the wellbeing of children from low-income communities in a city through evidence-based programmes, beginning in two communities before expanding citywide. The project targets improvements across five critical areas of children's health and development: education and skills attainment, behaviour, positive relationships, emotional wellbeing, and physical health.

Evidence2Success also examines root causes that affect child wellbeing, and the influences on their lives. These influences include children's families, community norms and expectations, and schools. Many children growing up in deprived communities are also influenced by public agencies, which often support families' basic needs or, in child welfare or juvenile offending cases, take on a parental role in the child's life. Evidence2Success unites all of these influences, to develop a shared vision for their health and development.

A new opportunity for schools

Why should schools engage in Evidence2Success? The majority of children aged 5 to 16 are expected to attend school, regardless of what is happening in other areas of their lives. As a result, teachers and administrators are pressured to take on non-academic responsibilities that can have a negative impact on pupils' school performance, as these responsibilities often take time away from classroom teaching.

Evidence2Success brings together teachers and administrators in partnerships with parents, the community, and public agencies to address non-academic challenges. By combining schools' administrative data with information collected from children and their parents, the partnerships can examine both the academic and non-academic influences on children's behaviour.

Evidence2Success engages schools in offering evidence-based programmes, such as bullying prevention and life skills programmes, to remediate non-academic challenges. In addition, it offers evidence-based education and skills attainment programmes such as Reading Recovery and Success for All.

How Evidence2Success works

Evidence2Success employs four basic strategies that, when used in combination, have the potential to produce greater benefits for children's health and development. The Foundation and its partners selected these strategies based on decades of research and experience in public health, community engagement, and change management within public agencies and schools.

What we know

- It is important to tackle the root causes that affect child wellbeing.
- Evidence2Success targets education and skills attainment as well as behaviour, positive relationships, emotional wellbeing, and physical health.
- Evidence-based programmes, strong partnerships, and sustainable financing are key to success.

Work together. Cities and communities have a greater likelihood of improving child wellbeing by forming partnerships and establishing a shared vision of success. That vision can build on the work of existing initiatives or identify new ways of working together to achieve goals. First, a citywide partnership of local authority representatives, social services staff, school leaders, and community members will provide oversight for the project. Second, two community partnerships will engage school administrators and teachers, local authority and social services staff, and community members in managing the work. The partnership will provide a forum for identifying challenges, setting priorities, and selecting proven programmes that address children's strengths and needs.

Make use of evidence. Partners also commit to using the best information to select programmes proven to benefit children and young people. A survey that measures all five areas of child wellbeing and the root causes that affect them will serve as the primary tool for gathering data about children in Evidence2Success communities. First, the citywide partnership develops a "big picture" view of child wellbeing by combining administrative data with data from a survey conducted with children in school, children involved with public agencies, and the parents of young children.

Second, each community partnership will interpret the survey data and match it to specific programmes for the community's children. For example, survey data that shows high levels of poverty, anti-social behaviour, and drug abuse indicates that children are at risk of failing in school or even dropping out. Partners can use that data to select a programme that reduces the barriers to learning caused by those risks, and that enhances academic achievement and commitment.

Third, the citywide partnership will use both individual programme and survey data to measure changes in child wellbeing. During the project's first few years, partners will focus on data that shows how children involved in the selected proven programmes

are doing. In addition, the citywide partnership will conduct the survey every two years, allowing all partners to track trends in child well-being across each community.

Invest smarter for greater returns. Schools and public agencies that can track trends in child wellbeing are well-positioned to make effective use of their financial resources. Evidence2Success finance coaches support schools and public agencies in changing how programmes are funded. Working together, they analyse available funding sources, collect information on programme usage and spending, and identify opportunities to deploy resources to better target children's needs and strengths.

For example, a city's analysis may reveal that a high level of funding is spent on sending a small number of teenagers to behavioural units as the result of behaviour problems at school. To reduce costs, schools and specialist units could partner on a proven programme to address mental health issues and problem behaviour. Alternatively, a local authority may choose to replace the current programme with a proven programme that offers a high degree of certainty that it will produce results.

Evidence2Success finance coaches also work with schools and public agencies to develop a sustainable financing plan. Success will be defined by the citywide partnership's ability to decrease costs, increase effectiveness, and provide more children with access to proven programmes that help to stop problems before they occur. That process may create opportunities to redirect national or local funding, or develop public-private partnerships. The plan also may set performance-based incentives for providers to meet. The plan could establish reinvestment compacts, which would guarantee that a portion of savings is redirected to specific areas of need, such as education or special education.

Create lasting change. Like any project or programme, Evidence2Success depends on people to achieve results. It also depends on an environment of continuous education and improvement. Throughout the five-year duration of the project, a team of Evidence2Success coaches will work with the citywide and community partnerships to build local capacity in six areas. All partners will attend an orientation about how Evidence2Success works. Partners will also have opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills related to leadership and decision making, outreach and engagement, data collection and evaluation, implementation of proven programmes, and sustainable financing. These learning opportunities will be available not only to school and public agency partners, but also

to the parents and young people whose lives are affected by the decisions the partnership make.

Next steps for Evidence2Success

Evidence2Success is currently being developed in the US, and elected officials from cities, states, and the federal government have already expressed interest in its potential to deliver on the promise of proven programmes. The foundation anticipates selecting the first city to implement Evidence2Success in the US in early 2012. An evaluation of the city's progress will allow the foundation to adapt the strategies and tools before introducing the approach in additional cities.

About the authors

Jessica Ripper, a senior communications associate at the Annie E Casey Foundation, supports the Evidence-Based Practice Team by guiding communications strategy and implementation for Evidence2Success: Improving Our Children's Futures. Prior to joining the foundation, she held positions as the director of marketing and communications and director of events at the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Abel Ortiz is director of the Evidence-Based Practice Team at the Annie E Casey Foundation, where he oversees Evidence2Success and grant-making to support the development and testing of evidence-based programmes.

Further reading

Axford N et al (2011), *The Readiness of Evidence-Based Programs for Implementation at Scale in Service Systems: Measurement Criteria and Preliminary Observations*. Global Implementation Conference, August 2011.

Catalano R (2011), *Communities that Care: Using Research to Prevent Delinquency and Drug Use*. Fifth Annual Kristen Anderson Moore Lecture, The Pew Charitable Trusts, October, 2011.

Fagan A et al (2011), *Methods for Ensuring High-Quality Implementation of Prevention Programs Coordinated by Community Coalitions*. Global Implementation Conference, August, 2011.

Hobbs T et al (2011), *Evidence2Success: Robust Data on Outcomes, Risk and Protection to Inform the Focused Implementation of Evidence-Based Interventions*. Global Implementation Conference, August, 2011.