

Big Ideas for Little Kids: Policies to Transform the Next Decade

Implementing Evidence-Based Contract Review for Public Funding

Problem	Public contracts intended to benefit children and youth are often issued based on simple deliverables, such as “time and materials,” or provision of services, without consideration of the outcomes expected. For example, a contract may simply require a contractor/agency to conduct classes or engage in tutoring. By contrast, an <i>evidence-based contract</i> would examine the effectiveness of the services provided, including improved outcomes like academic performance or graduation rates. Without review of effectiveness, contracts may become “routine” and issued to specific agencies because “that’s the way we’ve always done it” or even based on factors like relationships, which contractor did the most appealing presentation, or lowest cost <i>without</i> consideration of actual or most likely outcome.
Solution	Evidence-based Contract Review means that public entities, like local and State governments or school districts, engage in contracts with outside agencies/organizations based on the <i>known effectiveness</i> of the services. (What are the outcomes? How do we know this will work? Are there studies that show the intervention has a more positive impact than other interventions or simply doing nothing?) This includes a <i>defined process</i> to determine this and a panel of <i>reviewers</i> skilled in understanding evidence-based programs.
Existing Experience	<p>The Rochester City School District has recently considered piloting evidence-based contracts for some services, such as programs focused on behavior, mental health, and violence prevention.</p> <p>The Partnership for Results is an innovative quasi-governmental entity in Cayuga County, NY dedicated to promoting the positive social, emotional, and educational development of youth and their families. Among its various strategies, it has promoted that public funding be used to support evidence-based programs, and that county decision-making and contracting be more consistently data-driven based on effectiveness of the services provided.</p> <p>The State of Washington has recently (June 2011) conducted a review of its contracting practices in an effort to move toward increased performance-based and evidence-based contracting. It found that based on prior state efforts to promote evidence-based contracting, about 50% of issued contracts included performance-based outcomes.</p> <p>In other countries, most notably Denmark, contracts for emerging use of health care technology, like health information technology, have been tied to evidence of expected improvements in measured health outcomes.</p>

What's Next?	We need to learn more about the process and outcomes of efforts for evidence-based contracting in places like Cayuga County and Washington State. In addition, stakeholders, policy makers and staff in local public entities like the County, City, or Rochester City School District, would need to come together to test initial implementation of evidence-based contracting. Ultimately a written policy and procedure to ensure evidence-based contract review would need to be formalized by one or more local public entities (County, City, and School District).
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