How Can You Show That Your Education Products Are Research-Based?

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PreK-12 decision-makers require evidence that the instructional products they purchase have a positive impact on student learning.

> *A research foundations white paper is an essential tool in marketing to K-12 school districts.*

Large education companies often sponsor efficacy research to demonstrate that a product has a direct impact on student achievement. But most companies can't afford this or can't wait for results of a yearlong study. Instead, they develop a research foundations white paper (RFWP) to show that the instructional methods and approaches incorporated into the product are research-based. This is now an essential tool in marketing successfully to school district decision-makers across the U.S.

What should a research foundations white paper look like, and how can you develop a credible paper?

> *A research foundations white paper consists of claims, evidence, and how to link it to the educational product.*

An RFWP consists of three main elements: claims, evidence, and how to link it to the product.

Claims

The RFWP starts with claims or assertions about the program and its impact on student learning or other desired student outcomes. For example:

- Explicit and systematic early literacy instruction results in improved reading abilities for beginning readers.

- Deep thinking for transferable knowledge results when students understand the general principles underlying specific facts, concepts, and examples.

- Formative assessment and progress monitoring that guides instruction helps students to learn more effectively.

Evidence

The paper then presents several research sources with evidence supporting each claim. Randomized control trials and quasi-experiments provide strong evidence of a *causal* connection to academic achievement.

Meta-analyses—which use statistical analysis to draw conclusions across multiple studies—are particularly valuable because they represent a wide body of research.

Researchers and thinkers who can "connect the dots" among various lines of research and education theory are an important resource for this type of analysis. Companies also look to policy documents from reputable education organizations for their recommendations based on review of existing research.

Link to Your Product

Finally, the research foundations white paper explains in detail how the product incorporates the research findings to impact student outcomes.

Developing a Research Foundations White Paper

The optimal point at which to incorporate research is when the product is in the development process. That way, developers can ensure that the program reflects the best available evidence about creating a positive impact on student learning.

However, education companies often rely on expert authors and designers who may be knowledgeable about instructional approaches but who may not be up-to-date on current research. If that's the case, companies will need to hire independent researchers to find the most relevant research for PreK-12 decision-makers.

Important questions to ask independent researchers include:

- Can you identify key elements of the product's approach that aligns with research evidence?
- Do you have a process for quickly identifying the most important, credible, and up-to-date research?
- Are you experienced at describing research and presenting findings simply to district decision-makers?
- Can you help our company explain how our product aligns with the research findings?

Getting the Most Out of a Research Foundations White Paper After It's Developed

- Make it available on your website as a downloadable PDF.
- Make it available to sales representatives to use as a leave behind.
- Distribute it at conferences.

- Create a summary for prospects to use in grant proposals.

To explore how IESD can help you prepare a research foundations white paper for your education product, call 212-769-1715.

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