

Putting school research into action

APA's Div. 16 seeks to make sure research-backed programs don't gather dust on school shelves.



Tim Parnell/Corbis

School psychologists are critiquing their research strategies with an eye toward designing programs that are more teacher-friendly.

BY JAMIE CHAMBERLIN
Monitor staff

Decades of research has pinpointed which interventions work to improve schools, from boosting learning and motivation to curbing bullying and substance abuse. The challenge lies in getting teachers to weave these proven programs into already jam-packed curricula.

"More and more school programs have been designated as evidence-based over the last two decades, but we also know the actual use of them in school settings is lower than people would like to see," says Susan G. Forman, PhD, who chairs Rutgers University's department of applied psychology and directs its school psychology program. "Making them available doesn't mean people will be implementing them."

A Div. 16 (School) committee led by

Forman is working to change that. As part of the division's Evidence-Based Interventions in School Psychology Task Force, the committee interviewed researchers behind 29 popular evidence-based programs to find out which programs schools are embracing and why some interventions work better at some schools.

So far, they've learned that programs should be developed with school staff if they are to produce healthier students

rather than administrative headaches and that support from school leaders is critical. Forman and task force co-chair Kimberly Hoagwood, PhD, of Columbia University, found that when the principal backs a program, it's likely to succeed.

"It doesn't matter if you have a high-quality program," Hoagwood says. "If you don't have the leadership support behind it, it's likely to bomb."

In addition, teachers need ongoing support for delivering the program, rather than one-time workshops. And training has to be convenient for already time-strapped teachers. "Putting anything into a teacher's day needs to be done carefully," adds Hoagwood.

A final secret to success: Tailor the program's message to a school's philosophy or mission. One research team Forman and Hoagwood interviewed reported troubles with a program at a particular school because its message that "all feelings are OK" clashed with the school's zero-tolerance approach to feelings of anger.

Some programs won't fit at some schools, says Forman, but by polishing and streamlining school psychology's approach to research and program design, she and other division leaders hope to keep good programs from failing.

"There is so much power in

what happens in schools with the connection between learning and social and emotional development," adds Hoagwood. "If we can get it right, we can change the lives of kids forever." ■

Div. 16 (School), the Society for the Study of School Psychology and the National Association of School Psychologists support the Evidence-Based Interventions in School Psychology Task Force and its Committee on Evidence-Based Practice in School Psychology. The task force is chaired by Thomas Kratochwill, PhD, of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and Kimberly Hoagwood, PhD, of Columbia University. The task force's work is part of a 10-year division effort to improve intervention research and school psychologist training.

The U.S. Department of Education has funded the work of several division leaders, including Kratochwill and committee co-chair Susan Forman, PhD. Her research is focused on preparing new researchers to work more closely with school staff on delivering evidence-based interventions in the schools.

The division has also compiled a guide for conducting effective intervention research, which members hope will become a staple of graduate research methodology courses and have made it available at www.indiana.edu/~div16.

Div. 16 (School) at a glance

The 2,030 members of Div. 16 (School) are school psychology scientist-practitioners and traditional school psychologists. Members receive the APA journal *School Psychology Quarterly* and the quarterly newsletter "The School Psychologist." To join, contact Lea A. Theodore at Lea.Theodore@qc.cuny.edu. For more information, visit the division's Web site at www.indiana.edu/~div16.

APA PRACTICE ORGANIZATION
COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Certificate of Proficiency in the Treatment of Alcohol and Other Psychoactive Substance Use Disorders

- A national credential offered exclusively to licensed psychologists
- Effective with consumers, referral sources, and third-party payors
- Designed to identify psychologists who have acquired the knowledge and experience to appropriately diagnose, treat, and prevent alcohol and other substance use disorders

Psychopharmacology Examination for Psychologists (PEP)

- An on-line psychology learning platform to empower users that permits qualified psychologists to practice psychotropic medications
- A secure, credential banking of PEP scores for qualified graduates of postdoctoral psychopharmacology educational programs
- Psychopharmacology training programs may use the PEP as a valid CME opportunity

APA PRACTICE ORGANIZATION COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242
Phone: (202) 336-6000 • TDD: (202) 336-6171
Fax: (202) 336-6181
E-mail: apainfo@collegeofpro.org