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Where Do Educators Turn to Address Instructional and Behavior Challenges?

Teachers and school leaders frequently make decisions about which strategies will best support students who struggle academically or behaviorally, but evidence-based information about the quality of these strategies is not always available. Moreover, educators do not always find the available evidence to be relevant or useful,[1] and educators need to consider a wide range of factors beyond evidence, including the ways in which particular interventions address their community, school, and classroom contexts. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides new opportunities to use federal funds to support interventions (i.e., programs, practices, or strategies) that address not only academic achievement but also students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs.[2] Several ESSA funding streams require that interventions be supported by research evidence and by an assessment of local context and the specific needs of students.[3] Such resources as the What Works Clearinghouse and the Regional Education Laboratories can help educators identify relevant evidence, but education leaders and policymakers need to understand which sources educators turn to and on what basis they select interventions. Recent survey data from the RAND Corporation's AEP can inform our understanding of where educators find academic and nonacademic strategies—from peers, leaders, the internet, or other sources.

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[1] Blackman, 2018; Finnegan, Daly, and Che, 2013.
[2] Public Law 114-95, 2015.
[3] Grant et al., 2017; Walsh, Rolls Reutz, and Williams, 2015; Corbett and Redding, 2017; Wrabel et al., 2018; Chiefs for Change, 2018.

In the spring 2018 American Educator Panels (AEP) surveys, we asked nationally representative samples of teachers and principals the following questions:

• **If your students were struggling in a particular academic area (e.g., algebra), where is the first place you would go to find an intervention to support them?/If your teachers needed resources for meeting student academic needs (e.g., algebra), where is the first place you would you point them to find an intervention?[1]**

• **If your students were struggling in a particular nonacademic area (e.g., attendance, behavior), where is the first place you would go to find an intervention to support them?/ If your teachers needed resources for meeting student nonacademic needs, where is the first place you that would you point them to find an intervention?[2]**

• **How important is each of the following to you when selecting interventions (e.g., materials, programs) to support students?[3]**

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[1] Respondents were asked to "think about the interventions [e.g., targeted programs, strategies] your school uses to support student outcomes"; response options are shown in Figure 1.
[2] Response options are shown in Figure 1.
[3] Response options are shown in Figure 2.

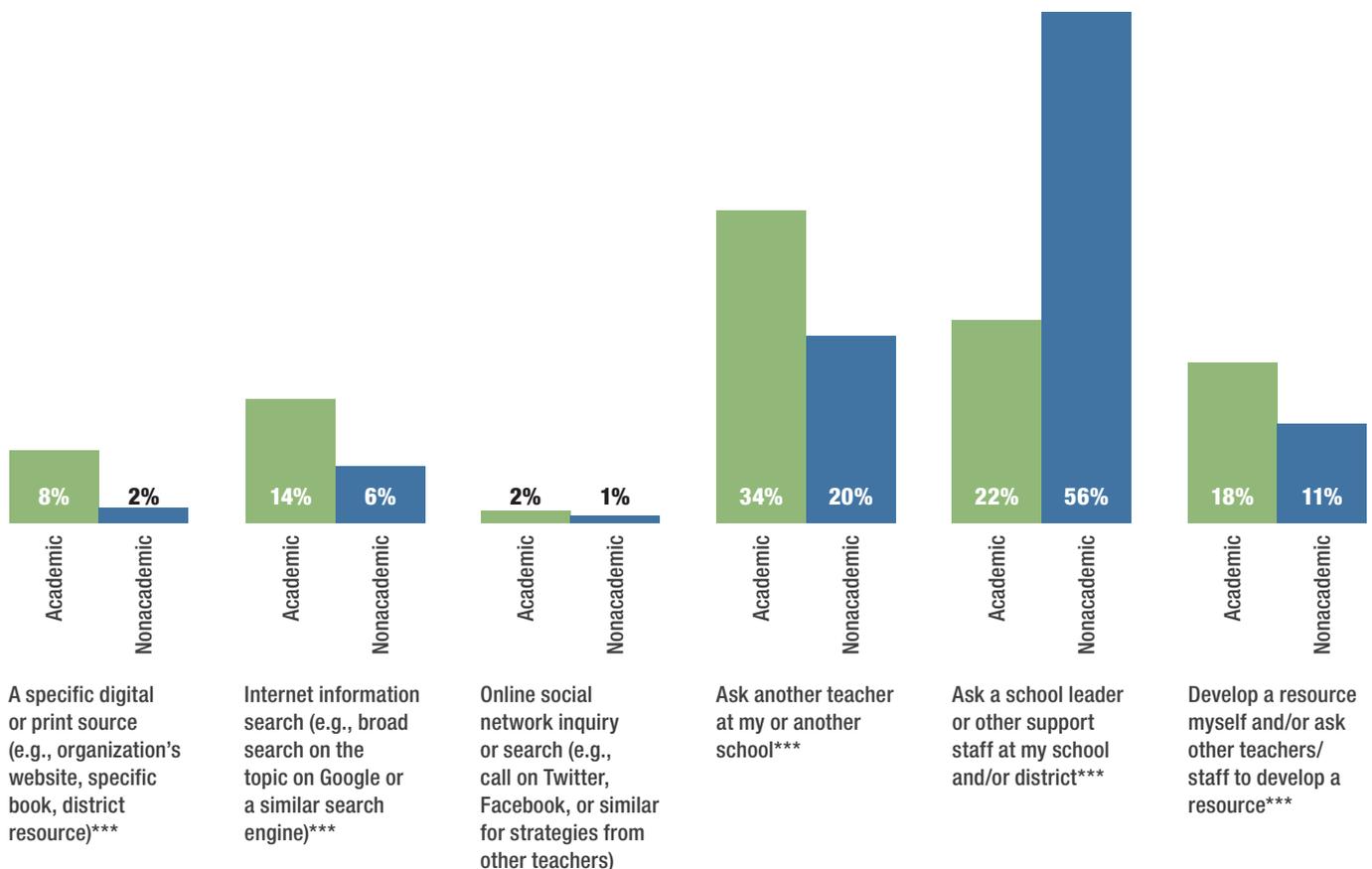## Colleagues Are a Valued Source of Guidance for Both Principals and Teachers

More than half of teachers indicated that the first source they would use to find an intervention would be another teacher, support staff, or a school or district leader (Figure 1), but the pattern of responses differed for academic and nonacademic needs. The percentage of teachers who said they would go to a school or district leader or to support staff was higher for nonacademic than for academic interventions (56 percent versus 22 percent). In contrast, the percentage of teachers who said they would turn to another teacher was higher for academic than nonacademic interventions (34 percent versus 20 percent). Principals also tended to recommend that teachers consult with colleagues, with approximately

FIGURE 1

Teachers Turn to Other Teachers for Academic Interventions and to Leaders, Support Staff for Nonacademic Needs

Weighted Percentages of Teachers Who Indicated Sources of Interventions They Would Turn to First to Support Struggling Students

A specific digital or print source (e.g., organization's website, specific book, district resource)***		Internet information search (e.g., broad search on the topic on Google or a similar search engine)***		Online social network inquiry or search (e.g., call on Twitter, Facebook, or similar for strategies from other teachers)		Ask another teacher at my or another school***		Ask a school leader or other support staff at my school and/or district***		Develop a resource myself and/or ask other teachers/staff to develop a resource***	
Academic	Nonacademic	Academic	Nonacademic	Academic	Nonacademic	Academic	Nonacademic	Academic	Nonacademic	Academic	Nonacademic
8%	2%	14%	6%	2%	1%	34%	20%	22%	56%	18%	11%

NOTES: The y-axis reflects the percentage of teachers indicating that they would turn to a particular source first. Asterisks indicate results of a linear probability model used to estimate differences between responses regarding academic and nonacademic interventions. *** $p < 0.001$.

half indicating that the first resource on interventions they would recommend to their teachers would be a teacher, staff member, or administrator at their own or another school. Principals' responses were similar for academic and nonacademic areas (not shown in figure).

For academic interventions, nearly one-fifth of teachers reported that their initial strategy would be to develop a resource themselves or ask other staff to do so; 11 percent of teachers said this would be their initial strategy for nonacademic interventions. Teachers also were more likely to conduct an internet search for academic (14 percent) than nonacademic (6 percent) interventions. Online social networks were the least frequently selected resource among both teachers and principals; fewer than 2 percent in each group selected this option.

Principals and Teachers Seek Evidence-Based Interventions Applicable to Their Own Contexts

Both principals and teachers reported considering multiple factors when selecting interventions. Among principals, the factors most frequently rated as "very important" were applicability to their students or school context (76 percent) and rigor of evidence regarding intervention efficacy (70 percent; see Figure 2). For teachers, top factors were applicability to students or school context (78 percent), ease of implementation (61 percent), and ease of accessing information and resources (61 percent). Relatively few teachers or principals indicated that personal word of

How This Analysis Was Conducted

For each question regarding selecting interventions, we treated each option as a binary indicator (i.e., the respondents chose the option or not). When analyzing the factors that influenced intervention selection, we collapsed each item into dichotomous indicators, measuring whether the respondent chose "very important" versus all other options ("not at all important," "slightly important," or "somewhat important"). The primary analyses were conducted using weighted linear probability models to compare the responses. For the questions regarding sources to which respondents turned when looking for interventions, responses for academic areas were compared with the corresponding interventions for nonacademic areas. For the questions regarding the importance of different factors in informing selection of interventions, teacher and principal responses were compared with each other. Finally, we compared the responses for all questions by school level (primary versus secondary) and by school free and reduced-price lunch category level (75 percent or more students receiving free or reduced-price lunch versus all other categories).

To assess whether the differences between teachers' and principals' responses varied by school characteristics, we performed chi-squared tests using weighted cross tabulation by school level and school poverty characteristics separately for each item. We also conducted supplemental analyses that included additional school covariates and a vector of state fixed effects to understand whether the associations found in the primary analysis were potentially confounded by characteristics of the schools or respondents. These multivariate weighted linear probability models included a series of demographic control variables from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.[1]

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[1] These included school-level variables, such as urbanicity; percentage free and reduced-price lunch; percentage white, black, Hispanic, and Asian; Title 1 status; an indicator for elementary school; district-level variables, such as percentage English language-learner students and special education students; and state-level fixed effects.

mouth or the popularity of interventions were important considerations.

For both principals and teachers, responses were generally similar across different types of schools, with some exceptions. For example, a higher percentage of elementary principals than secondary principals rated rigor of evidence as very important (75 percent versus 64 percent). Similarly, higher percentages of principals and teachers in high-poverty schools rated rigor of evidence as very
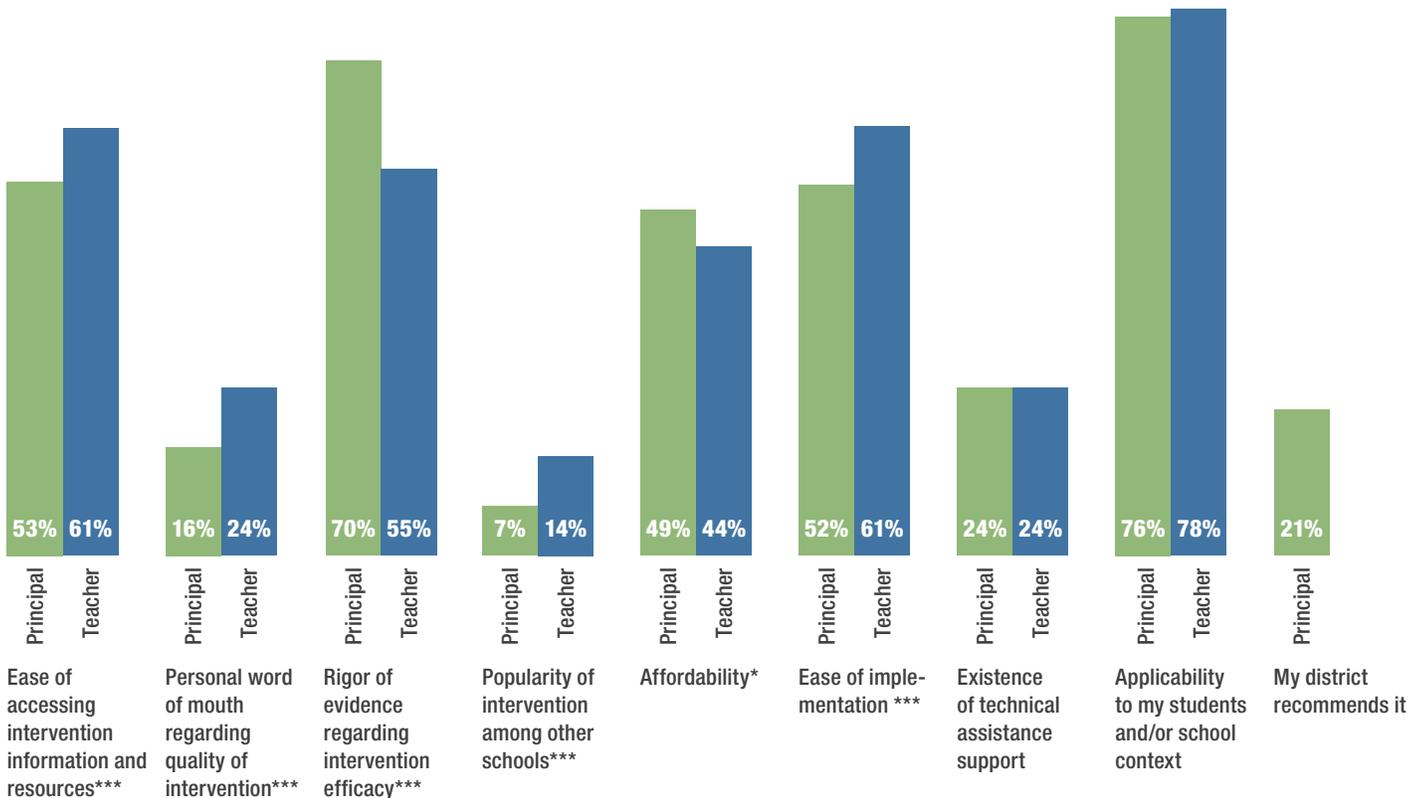
important compared with those in lower-poverty schools (78 percent versus 68 percent, respectively, for principals, and 60 percent versus 53 percent, respectively, for teachers).[4]

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[4] These differences between respondents from high- and low-poverty schools were statistically significant when we controlled for grade level, enrollment, educator demographics, and state fixed effects. They lost significance when we controlled for urbanicity and the percentage of English language learners in the school, which could be because these variables tend to be highly correlated with our poverty measure.

FIGURE 2

Applicability to Students, School Context Most Important for Both Teachers and Principals

Weighted Percentages of Educators Who Indicated Factors as Very Important for Informing Selection of Interventions

	Ease of accessing intervention information and resources***	Personal word of mouth regarding quality of intervention***	Rigor of evidence regarding intervention efficacy***	Popularity of intervention among other schools***	Affordability*	Ease of implementation ***	Existence of technical assistance support	Applicability to my students and/or school context	My district recommends it
Principal	53%	16%	70%	7%	49%	52%	24%	76%	21%
Teacher	61%	24%	55%	14%	44%	61%	24%	78%	

NOTES: Asterisks indicate results of a linear probability model used to estimate differences between responses regarding academic and nonacademic interventions. * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$. The item "My district recommends it" appeared only on the principal survey.

Discussion

These survey findings shed some light on factors that influence educators' decisions about interventions. Although surveys provide incomplete information about educators' actual practices, the nationwide scope of the AEP provides a valuable way to highlight the voices of educators. Both principals and teachers reported considering several factors when selecting interventions, including relevance to local context, rigor of evidence, and feasibility concerns. These findings suggest that educators may benefit from guidance to help balance these considerations. An intervention that appears highly aligned with local context might not have much evidence of effectiveness, so educators will need advice as they consider trade-offs as part of their decisionmaking. Educators in high-poverty schools were more likely than those in lower-poverty schools to report that rigorous evidence was a very important factor, but most educators also said that they considered fit with local context when choosing interventions. Much of the research on interventions has been carried out in high-poverty schools, so for at least some interventions, educators in such schools might be able to find resources that are both relevant and evidence-based.

The findings also indicate that colleagues are a highly valued source of guidance for both principals and teachers. Researchers and policymakers who are interested in promoting greater use of high-quality, evidence-based materials should consider ways to leverage existing colleague networks or develop new ones that can foster productive dialogue about relevant, effective interventions. Local education agencies (LEAs) have opportunities to draw on funds from the ESSA and other sources to address a wide range of student academic and behavioral needs. LEAs can support educators by helping them identify evidence-based interventions aligned with local needs and contextual factors and by providing opportunities for educators to engage with their colleagues on decisionmaking. LEAs also can familiarize teachers and school leaders with resources that provide information about evidence-based interventions, develop guidance to help translate this information into practice, and support teachers and school leaders in gathering and using data that could further support evidence-based decisionmaking. Enhancing educators' capacity to gather and make sense of data, perhaps through such resources as researcher-practitioner partnerships, provides a potentially powerful path toward connecting educators' interest in evidence with their desire for interventions tied to their own classroom and school contexts.[5]

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[5] Coburn and Penuel, 2016.

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About the AEP Data Note Series

About This Report

The American Educator Panels (AEP) are nationally representative samples of teachers and school leaders across the country.

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