

National High School Center Research Review Criteria

To help the Regional Comprehensive Centers (RCCs) and states support high schools in adopting research-based educational strategies that show evidence of effectiveness, the National High School Center (NHSC) is developing standards for determining the quality of the evidence and categorizing strategies based on this evidence. The purpose of the research review criteria is to examine the research available and provide RCCs with studies in which the NHSC has confidence in the results reported.

Through systematic searches of the literature guided by protocols, the NHSC identifies and collects relevant research studies on a priority topic or for a request received by a RCC. These studies then undergo a preliminary screen to ensure they meet the following criteria¹:

- Relevant to the topic
- Published within the past 15 years
- Includes high school aged students
- Conducted in the U.S.
- Sufficient research methodology information is available to assess the quality of the study (i.e., research design, statistical analyses, and reliability and validity of outcome measures)

All studies that pass the preliminary screen are reviewed using the NHSC standards. Quantitative studies are sorted by research design and placed on a research continuum based on the initial rigor of the design (see Exhibit 1). The studies, with the exception of meta-analyses and research syntheses, are then reviewed for causal validity against quality indicators specific to each design. Studies are reviewed in three areas: 1) Measurement; 2) Design and Analyses; and 3) Implementation. Studies can be “downgraded” by one or two levels, or fail out of the review if there are threats to causal validity. The level of downgrade is dependent on the severity of the threat.

Exhibit 1. Research Designs Continuum

Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Synthesis/Meta-Analysis	Quasi-Experimental Designs with Matching or Equating	Repeated Measures Design (Longitudinal Studies)
Randomized Controlled Trial	Interrupted Time Series Design	Nonequivalent Groups Design
Regression Discontinuity Designs	Correlational Designs with Multilevel Modeling	One Group Pre-Post Designs
Single Subject Designs		Correlational Designs
		Descriptive Designs

Studies with a final level designation as 3 or 2 are then posted on the NHSC website.

¹ Exceptions to the criteria are made for certain topics and for seminal research studies.

Meta-analyses and research syntheses are screened on a different set of indicators that include: 1) Inclusionary Criteria; 2) Study Retrieval Process; 3) Coding of Study Quality; 4) Statistical Analyses; 5) Presentation of Studies; and 6) Generalizability of Studies. Each indicator is rated on a scale from 1 to 10. Scores are then averaged. Syntheses and meta-analyses with an average score of greater than 5 are posted on the NHSC website.

Qualitative designs have a separate set of rubrics that focus on: 1) Study Purpose; 2) Literature Review; 3) Study Design; 4) Data Collection; 5) Data Analysis; 6) Trustworthiness; and 7) Conclusions.