

# Rapid Reviews of Evidence in Online and Distance Learning Programs

## STEMworks Xpress™ at WestEd®

### A Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

**NEED:** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the national shift to online and distance learning, STEMworks™ at WestEd® stands ready to conduct rapid reviews and identify high-quality programs to support at-home learning while physical schools are shutdown. We can work with you to respond to current school closures and prepare for future closures by addressing critical needs that will likely extend beyond the current school year. Recognizing that **families** and **educators** are struggling to find **high-quality online and distance learning programs**:

- Educators **NEED** easy-to-implement resources that align with classroom curricula and actually promote learning.
- Families **NEED** easy-to-use programs that can be implemented at home with available technology.
- Families and educators **DO NOT NEED** websites with 100s of links to unvetted programs, or as one parenting blog recently bemoaned, “the truly endless pit of free educational resources.”

**SOLUTION:** STEMworks at WestEd has a decade of experience conducting reviews to identify high quality education programs. To meet the current needs of families and educators, we propose **STEMworks Xpress**, a modified review system that leverages our experience with evidence-based reviews while conducting rapid reviews of online and distance learning programs. **STEMworks Xpress** can work with education leaders and decision makers to review programs using publicly available information to identify programs that demonstrate strong evidence of providing standards-aligned **curricula** and **assessments** for learning relevant **content** and **practices**, addressing the learning needs of **diverse learners**, and providing support for **implementation** through strong **instructional resources**.

**EXPANDING CAPACITY:** **STEMworks Xpress** would leverage the experience and expertise within WestEd to conduct rapid reviews to identify high-quality and easy-to-use online and distance learning programs of all types from across academic content areas. We have extensive evidence of success with STEMworks, which currently vets and identifies quality education programs at the national, state, and local level through an efficient, but rigorous, evidence-based review process, using criteria defined by the STEMworks Design Principles and Rubric (STEMworks.WestEd.org). We propose applying what we have learned in conducting STEMworks reviews to **STEMworks Xpress**, which would feature a modified rapid-review process to examine publicly available information and evidence available through program websites and published materials, third-party reviews, evaluation reports, and research articles.

Rapid reviews will be conducted using a modified rubric with clear criteria in four review categories:

1. **Implementation** – Does the program provide online training and resources for parents and teachers to show how programming can be implemented and to support ongoing use?
2. **Challenging and Relevant Content** – Does the program provide curricula in academic content areas that are aligned to relevant local, state, or national standards, set high expectations for all learners by assessing understanding of content, and communicate progress to inform instructional planning?

3. **Practices and Skills** – Does the program incorporate and encourage the development of practices, skills, and competencies specific to each academic content area?
4. **Diverse Learners** – Does the program identify and address the needs of diverse learners?

We can work with you to disseminate the results of **STEMworks Xpress** reviews to those who need it most, using a variety of filter options to allow families and educators to identify programs using the following criteria:

- **Grade Level** – Elementary (preK-grade 5), Middle (Grade 6-8), or High School (Grade 9-12)
- **Academic Content Area** – Science, Mathematics, Reading, Writing, Social Studies, and/or Career Technical Education (CTE)
- **Standards Alignment** – NGSS, Common Core, National Council for the Social Studies, College and Career Readiness Standards, state level
- **Cost** – free, discounted, or full-price
- **Depth of Content** – full course or supplemental
- **Platform** – browser or app-based; technology requirements
- **Instruction and Learning Environment** – synchronous or asynchronous instruction and learning
- **Strength of Evidence** – programs with research-based development of materials and third-party evaluations will be noted
- **Attention to Diverse Learner Groups** – programs that offer resources and materials in multiple languages and learning modes and support the needs of English Learners will be noted

**ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY:** WestEd is a preeminent educational research, development, and service organization with over 700 employees and 15 offices nationwide. WestEd has been a leader in moving research into practice by conducting research and development (R&D) programs, projects, and evaluations; by providing training and technical assistance; and by working with policymakers and practitioners at state and local levels to carry out large-scale school improvement and innovative change efforts. WestEd’s approach to quantitative and qualitative research design, evaluation studies, and data collection is grounded in research, rigor, and responsiveness to client needs. WestEd has worked extensively with ED, state education agencies, school districts on a vast array of research, evaluation, and service projects—including REL studies; i3 validation and development projects; IES, DOJ, and National Science Foundation (NSF) studies; and GSA contracts.

**STEMworks Xpress** will, as needed, leverage experience and expertise from across WestEd. STEMworks at WestEd currently has a stable of experienced reviewers who can conduct rapid reviews for a wide range of program types, focusing on online and distance learning programs. The STEM program at WestEd has extensive experience conducting product reviews and small-scale research studies across different content areas, doing so for a variety of projects, including SBIR Phase I and II studies, NewSchools Venture Fund’s EdTech Challenge accelerator, NAEP Framework updates, third-party evaluation projects, and other large- and small scale qualitative and quantitative research studies.

We are confident that the **STEMworks Xpress** platform, staff, and process can be developed in a minimal amount of time to conduct rapid reviews for online and distance learning programs of all types. Now is the critical time to provide timely, evidence-based reviews to inform educator and family decision making. We can we work with you to make **STEMworks Xpress** work for the families and educators who are need of these critical resources.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Contact Mark Loveland, Project Director of STEMworks at WestEd at [mlovela@wested.org](mailto:mlovela@wested.org).