

# Surviving No Child Left Behind

Bob Stimolo

Recently, I had the opportunity to conduct a program at the Ed Expo 2006 show in Orlando. It gave me, along with my wife Lynn, the chance to celebrate the 90th anniversary of NSSEA and visit with many of our friends who attended the show.

All of us at SMRI have been trying to understand how NCLB is changing the marketplace. The topic of my NSSEA program was Staying Ahead of No Child Left Behind. I tried to put the impact of NCLB in perspective and suggest how we might revisit our marketing programs in light of its growing impact.

My wife Lynn recently filed the following report on the topic of scientifically-based research, one of the issues associated with NCLB. While it can be a strong product benefit worth promoting, it must be substantiated.

Scientifically-based research, or SBR, has become a hot topic in the education market. That's because schools are under increasing pressure to use federal dollars for products and programs whose effectiveness have been proven through this method.

In fact, SBR is mentioned on over 100 separate occasions in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. This legislation mandates that SBR must be incorporated in strategies for school improvement, professional development, and English language instruction for Title III grantees.

According to the K-12 Technology Review 2004-2005, published by Market Data Retrieval (MDR) of Shelton, CT, one-third of districts reported that during

2005, they were required to purchase only software/online content that was backed by SBR. Slightly more than one-half reported that they were not required to do so, and the remaining 15% did not know. MDR's findings indicate that larger districts are considerably more likely to be required to purchase scientifically-based software/online content than smaller districts.

What, exactly, is scientifically-based research? Simply put, it is a method based on scientific evaluation to determine the effectiveness of a product, program, or service in the real world of education. SBR includes four basic steps: Observe, hypothesize, collect data/evidence, and draw conclusions.

For example, as a result of nationwide standardized tests given in grade 4, it is found that students are generally below acceptable levels in math. Company XYZ has a program called Alpha that they believe improves math scores in grades K-6.

Groups of students in grades K-6 are randomly selected from schools across the country. Each group is tested before

being introduced to the Alpha math program. The groups in each school are then divided in half. One half is taught math for a semester using the Alpha program while the other uses the existing curriculum. At the end of the semester, the students are tested and the scores are analyzed to reveal the difference in scores, if any, between students taught math through the Alpha program and those that were not. Conclusions are then formulated based on the evidence.

Any school marketer claiming that a product, program, or service causes or contributes to certain outcomes, such as improved student performance, should support these claims with scientifically obtained evidence. Educators are now asking for this evidence when evaluating the quality of their purchase options.

Because of the pressure on educators to use researched-based products and services, they are becoming increasingly sensitive when it comes to evaluating the evidence presented by marketers who make this claim. The best evidence adheres to the basic guidelines of scientifically-based research as indicated in the NCLB legislation and outlined in the chart below:

NCLB has not only made SRB an important issue in the school market, it has issued strict guidelines for its evaluation. Consequently, school marketers should not make the claim lightly, but be prepared to validate the claim with all the necessary backup data and information. As long as NCLB legislation is used to evaluate school performance, SRB will be a factor when promoting in the school market.

Relevant, rigorous, systematic, objective, reliable, and valid are all important

## Determination of Scientifically-Based Research Criteria

	% of Districts
Vendor must supply written documentation	65.3%
Recommendation from other schools/districts	62.6%
In-house expert has evaluated	57.1%
Favorable product review	43.8%
Vendor confirmation but no written documentation	9.1%
What Works Clearinghouse must give approval	7.3%
Other	6.4%

Source: Market Data Retrieval 2005

factors to educators when determining the quality of SRB claims. It is possible for a company to conduct its own well-executed and perfectly valid scientifically-based research regarding its own products, programs and/or services. However, some educators may perceive such in-house research as biased toward positive results.

In order to ensure scientifically-based research is conducted correctly and survives independent evaluation, it may be advisable to use an outside research consultant or firm to evaluate your products. If this is the path you choose, it is important that you select one of the highest quality.

Get references and establish their credentials. Do they have advanced degrees with training in research design and methodology? Are they active members and do they participate in scholarly societies such as the American Educational Research Association ([www.aera.net](http://www.aera.net)) or the American Evaluation Association ([www.eval.org](http://www.eval.org))? These organizations are recognized by professional education researchers.

The What Works Clearinghouse ([www.w-w-c.org](http://www.w-w-c.org)) was established by the U.S. Department of Education to review research and evaluate the evidence of effectiveness for specific educational approaches and interventions. It plans to establish an evaluator registry of researchers who agree to abide by the WWC standards for conducting product and program effectiveness research. This registry would be a good source of independent researchers for school marketers.

Those of you who missed my program at NSSEA can purchase a CD from the NSSEA Website [www.nssea.org](http://www.nssea.org). If you do, we would be happy to email you a copy of the PowerPoint presentation so you can follow along. To receive the PowerPoint presentation, please send an email to [info@smriinc.com](mailto:info@smriinc.com).

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