

Getting More Bang for Your Buck: Academic Return on Investment and the Investment Tracking System



Stephen Leach & Bo Yan
Accountability, Research, & Systems Improvement

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Quick! You've Got \$75,000 – How Do You Spend It???

Whether you're an elementary school principal selecting a new online math program, a middle school principal interested in improving school climate, or a high school principal seeking to boost college and career readiness, your mission is the same – invest in programs, strategies, and activities that produce the greatest returns for your students, preferably for the least cost. The returns on these investments are not financial in nature but instead dividends such as more proficient readers, increased CSS scores, or fewer out-of-school suspensions. While this may seem rather obvious, what may not seem clear is how to effectively select, implement, monitor, and evaluate such investments. How can educators navigate the sea of vendor hype, overly-complicated research articles, time pressures to improve, and many other obstacles to make wise investments in our students' futures?

On the one hand, gauging the returns of our investments into student success is not simply a matter of crunching numbers at the end of the budget cycle. In fact, if certain critical questions are not answered at each step of the investment process then we are in danger of investing unwisely. Even worse, we may not be able to determine whether our efforts were effective or not, essentially making school improvement a matter of chance. On the other hand, school leaders need practical, user-friendly tools that support and strengthen their existing school improvement efforts – not another heaping helping on already full plates.

In 2018, the department of Accountability, Research, and Systems Improvement (ARSI) was awarded a federal grant to partner with researchers at Columbia University to develop a practical way for JCPS decision-makers to gauge the cost-effectiveness of their investments. This work centers on academic return-on-investment, or simply AROI. Compared with typical program evaluations, AROI is much quicker to compute and facilitates comparisons across multiple types of investments. The AROI approach provides one piece of JCPS-specific evidence that school and district leaders can utilize for investment decisions based on the outcomes most important for their particular context. The lessons learned from our work thus far formed the basis for our updated Investment Tracking System, or "ITS 2.0" - currently in use for tracking ESSER III spending. The changes were intended to support and strengthen existing efforts to locate evidence-based practices, set reasonable goals, select appropriate measures for those goals, track participation, and monitor outcomes. In other words, with ITS 2.0, we sought to integrate AROI into the school improvement process by giving leaders a helpful tool to serve as a guide for organizing improvement efforts. Although this manual serves as a 'how to' for entering ESSER funds budget request proposals into ITS 2.0, the AROI concepts you'll be using can be broadly applied to other funding sources.

Accessing the Investment Tracking System

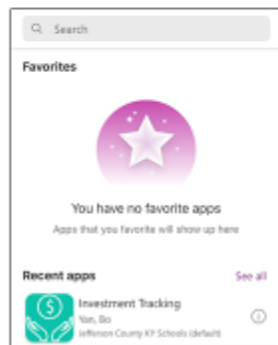
On a Phone or Tablet

1. Install Power Apps



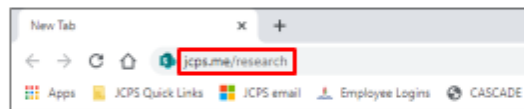
2. Login with your JCPS Microsoft credentials

3. Click "Investment Tracking"



On a Desktop or Laptop

1. Go to jcps.me/research in a browser window




2. Click "Investment Tracking System" on left center




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Using the Investment Tracking System

• General Themes

- Much information is pre-loaded in the system so that many fields will auto-populate
- Tool Tips – hover your mouse pointer over many icons and bold text headers for tips
- Required Fields – items highlighted in red are required
- Saving updates – use the green save icon  in the upper right hand corner

• If you need help...

- Each tab has a tutorial video – click the red camera icon  on the upper left hand side
- An example proposal (ID #6 – Reading ABC) can be accessed from the Home Tab for reference
- Contact jcps.esser@jefferson.kyschools.us

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Budget Request Proposal Overview

- Click the + icon on the Home Tab to create a new proposal
- Enter required info in four tabs
 - Overview – basic info
 - Target & Goal – population/measures
 - Budget – positions/categories
 - Plan – priority concern/evidence basis
- Submit for next-level approval once all required info has been entered



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What is the Planning Tab and why should we care?

- The Planning Tab is a visual *road map* that lays out the route to your desired destination to help keep you on track
- Helps you *clarify strategy* by:
 - Defining the priority concern and potential source of problem
 - Identifying key activities
 - Linking activities to outcomes
 - Describing the evidence basis



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Where do we begin?

- **What is our priority focus?**
 - Do we have a needs assessment or other supporting data?
 - Can we gather data or wait for MAP/KPREP scores?
- **What is the potential source of problem?**
- **What is our plan to improve?**
 - Aligned with CSIP goals and grade-level standards?
 - Have we engaged multiple stakeholders?
 - Evidence-based?



| | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| Priority Concern | <input type="text" value="For example, academic achievement of minority students or classroom instruction (100 characters limit)"/> | Evidence Level | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| Potential Source of Problem | <input type="text" value="For priority concern identified above, what is the potential source of problem (100 characters limit)"/> | | |

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What is my evidence level?

- **ESSER spending should be evidence-based**
 - Four-tiered system based on ESSA evidence levels
 - Hyperlink provided to KDE evidence descriptions (blue text)
- **Evidence Levels 1-3**
 - Enter all appropriate citations
 - Attach studies to the Overview Tab if you choose
 - Four box road map optional but strongly recommended
- **Evidence Level 4**
 - Four box road map required (see next two slides)

| | |
|---|--|
| Evidence Level | <input checked="" type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4 |
| <input type="text" value="Please provide citations from research articles for level 1 evidence (1,000 characters limit)."/> | |

Enter citations for Evidence Levels 1-3

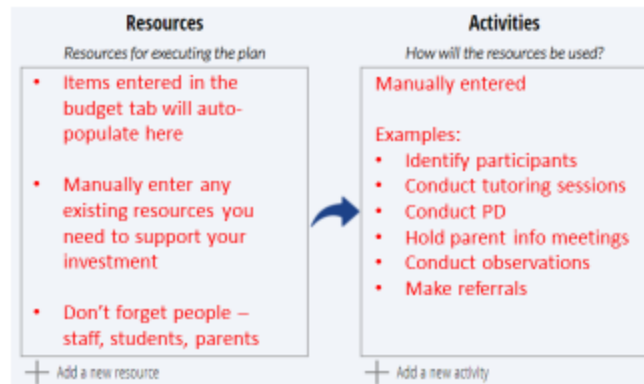
KDE Evidence Level hyperlink

| | |
|---|--|
| Evidence Level | <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input checked="" type="radio"/> 4 |
| <input type="text" value="Please complete the four boxes below laying out the rationale for this strategy."/> | |

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Filling in the blanks: Resources & Activities

- **What do we need to implement our plan?**
 - New resources (materials, software, PD...)
 - Existing resources (people, physical space, materials...)
 - Do we need resources for progress monitoring?
- **What will we do to implement our plan?**
 - How will each of the inputs contribute to the plan's success?
 - Does the plan include progress monitoring activities such as observations or surveys or roster-checks?

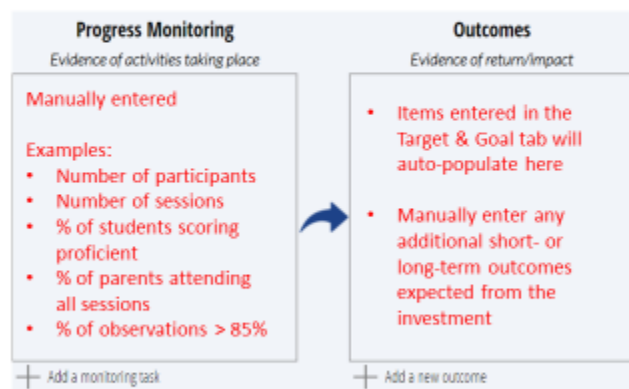


Click the "+" to add items

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Filling in the blanks: Progress Monitoring & Outcomes

- **How will we know we're on track?**
 - Measurable evidence of activities
 - Frequency, type, duration, and/or intensity
 - Don't forget about monitoring
- **What will the plan achieve?**
 - What are the intended consequences of the activities planned?
 - Any potential unintended consequences?
 - Are goals aligned with CSIP goals? Are they realistic and measurable?



Click the "+" to add items

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Need help with the Investment Tracking System?

jcps.esser@jefferson.kyschools.us

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