



Welcome to ICF *Education Connections*

From early education to K-12 and postsecondary schooling, ICF gives clients the insights they need to turn research into practice. In this issue, learn about:

- Design and evaluation of Investing in Innovation (i3) programs and college access initiatives at Tennessee community colleges.
- Resources under development to explain the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- ICF's leadership in the design and management of rigorous and informative research and program evaluation studies.

ICF is helping to improve educational outcomes by navigating clients through current and future challenges. Driving real improvements and demonstrating quantifiable results, ICF enhances our clients' capacity to achieve the outcomes they seek. Visit our [website](#) for more information about ICF in education. Want to share *Education Connections*? [Click here](#) to subscribe.

Driving Innovation to Improve Student Outcomes

ICF's history as a trusted partner in developing and carrying out Investing in Innovation grant (i3) evaluation studies uniquely positions the company to play a similar role for clients in the upcoming Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Competition. A major component of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), EIR is the successor to the i3 competitive grant program.

Each of our i3 projects involves working closely with our clients as they implement an innovative intervention to improve student outcomes. We work together with clients to design a rigorous research study that meets their information needs and has the potential to meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. ICF offers distinctive services geared to the EIR program, grounded in our expertise with the WWC standards and the i3

program. For example, ICF employs certified WWC reviewers, who prescreen our client's cited evidence for mid- and expansion-phase grants.

ICF is currently engaged in four i3 efforts—including a development evaluation of the College Possible program, two validation studies of the Collaborative Regional Education program for Jacksonville State University, and a development study of the Virginia Advanced Study Strategies Rural Math Innovation Network. ICF was also subcontractor on a fifth i3 evaluation of the Diplomas Now program.

Transform Through Evaluation in Tennessee

ICF's work in Tennessee demonstrates the transformational role of the third-party evaluator in enabling clients to understand the relationship between the implementation of programs and anticipated outcomes. In 2016, ICF completed a comprehensive evaluation of a consortium of Tennessee community colleges and technology centers established and led by Roane State Community College (RSCC) to develop successful pathways to health care employment. This program served over 8,000 students and met or exceeded their goals for enrollment and overall program graduation/completion. Furthermore, critical program components including Prior Learning Assessment, intensive coaching, and “bundling” noncredit courses were all significantly positively correlated with retaining employment, finding new employment, and receiving a wage increase following program completion.

Thanks to a new [Strengthening Institutions Program](#) (SIP) grant, RSCC plans to hire ICF again, this time to evaluate its comprehensive plan for student success, the [Mapping Your Guided Pathway to Success](#) (MY-GPS) program. Through the same SIP grant, ICF is evaluating the Chattanooga State Community College [Focus on Completion program](#), which supports and sustains high-impact practices designed to improve the college's graduation rate by at least five percentage points.

"Our team's experiences as the third-party evaluator for community colleges in Tennessee have been rewarding. ICF emphasizes the importance of collaborating with program staff and the added value of improving evaluation use that can come from this collaboration. Our clients in Tennessee have wholeheartedly entered into these projects, willing to collaborate, and it has paid off in the form of action and program improvement." – Thomas J. Horwood, ICF Principal

ESSA 101: Context and Guidance for New Federal Education Law

ICF has begun taping a three-episode series on the new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The first episode is posted on the [ARCC YouTube channel](#). The objectives of the series are to inform citizens in the region about ESSA; explore how the new law might affect states, districts, and schools; and provide information about how stakeholders can provide input to the law. The Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center also offers a resource page on its website for policy makers and practitioners looking for information and guidance on ESSA. Visit [this link](#) for resources either developed or shared by Content Centers in the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Center network.

"The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reduces the federal role in education accountability by eliminating many prescriptive requirements established by No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and provides states greater flexibility in designing their own accountability systems." – Jobi Lawrence, ICF Consultant

ICF Thought Leader Nate Hixson

For the past decade, **Nate Hixson** has supported K-12 and higher education stakeholders in meeting their diverse information needs by designing and carrying out rigorous and informative research and program evaluation studies. As a Senior Manager in ICF's Youth and Adult Education line of business, Nate currently manages all aspects of two i3-funded, multi-year, national randomized control trial studies of a college access and success program for rural middle and high school students. He also leads a third i3-funded quasi-experimental design study focused on evaluating the efficacy of a peer coaching program to improve non-cognitive skill outcomes for low income students in five major urban areas across the U.S.