



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH® | [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org)

Introduction

The challenges facing education, health care, and the workforce are daunting. All students deserve high-quality education, regardless of family income or background, just as everyone needs good, affordable health care. Our workforce needs skills and training for today's jobs, and the jobs of tomorrow. The urgency of these needs demands immediate attention—and solutions that work.

For nearly 75 years, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) has conducted rigorous research and applied evidence-based practices to address complex social issues and improve people's lives. AIR is one of the world's largest behavioral and social science research and evaluation organizations. Our overriding goal is to use the best science available to bring the most effective ideas and approaches to enhancing everyday life.

With a staff of 1,400 and offices across the globe, AIR works across sectors to help leaders make evidence-based decisions about policies and programs that contribute to a more equitable world. The intellectual diversity of our employees enables us to bring together experts from many fields in the search for innovative answers to challenges that span the human life course.

As a not-for-profit organization, we conduct our work with strict independence, objectivity and non-partisanship. AIR has a long history of working with national, federal, and state leaders on advancing sound policy practices steeped in evidence and research. More recently, in the wake of COVID-19, AIR has been engaged with leaders across the country on how to successfully deliver educational, health and workforce development services in new and improved ways.

Increasing the Effectiveness of Education

Our education work spans the learning lifespan—from pre-K to postsecondary education, career readiness, and adult education—and focuses on a wide range of topics and policies.

58%

of school districts found it more difficult to comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act during the pandemic.¹

Evidence-Informed Responses to COVID-19

Across the nation, educators are responding valiantly to an unprecedented health crisis and its ramifications for students, educators, and communities. AIR is providing research and best practices to support their efforts.

- **[National Survey of Public Education’s Response to COVID-19](#)**
AIR conducted a [nationally representative survey](#) of more than 2,500 school districts and charter management organizations to learn about the **actions they have taken and the challenges they have encountered** during the COVID-19-related school closures. This knowledge will inform the best approach to serving students as the landscape evolves.
- **[AIR’s COVID-19 Response and Resources](#)**
AIR’s research and technical assistance experience with [distance learning](#), [social and emotional learning](#), and [special student populations](#) has led to the creation of webinars, articles, and other resources to provide educators and parents with **evidence-based insights** on issues related to the pandemic. AIR’s [Center on Great Teachers and Leaders](#) offers education leaders resources on [grading policies](#) and [teacher appreciation](#).

¹ <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/COVID-Survey-Spotlight-on-Students-with-Disabilities-FINAL-Oct-2020.pdf>



Early Childhood Education and Development

Research shows that children are more successful in school and beyond if they are given a strong foundation in the earliest years of their lives. AIR works with early childhood service providers and policymakers to find solutions to practical challenges. For instance, our experts have evaluated pre-primary education programs overseas, including those in [Mozambique](#) and [Bangladesh](#), generating [critical information](#) on the **qualities of successful programs**, as well as **cost-effectiveness**.

Improving Outcomes in Education

[Regional Educational Laboratories](#) (RELs) and [Comprehensive Centers](#) led by AIR work with state and local educational agencies and schools to conduct applied research and provide capacity building services to support a more evidenced-based education system. Funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, REL Midwest is examining postsecondary education and [employment pathways in Minnesota](#) and postsecondary education **expectations and attainment** of [rural and nonrural students across the Midwest](#).

School Climate and Safety

When students feel safe and secure at school, they are more likely to attend regularly, achieve academically, and graduate. Research shows that [a positive, safe, and supportive school climate](#) is also an important factor in [preventing youth violence](#).

- **[Improving Schools and Strengthening Conditions for Learning](#)**
Following a school shooting in 2007, education leaders at the Cleveland Metropolitan School District realized that preventing further violence required a comprehensive approach. In support, AIR school safety and climate experts conducted interviews, surveys, focus groups, and site visits to provide a thorough view of the school system's strengths, assets, and areas for improvement. The resulting [social and emotional learning](#) approach is embedded into district policies and structures, serving as **a national model for fostering a positive, safe, and equitable school climate**.

Dual Enrollment Programs

Dual-enrollment programs, like [Early College High Schools](#), are a promising and cost-effective approach to giving high school students the experience of participating in college-level classes while also earning college credits.



AIR's research has found that being offered admission to an Early College had **positive impacts** for students on both college enrollment and degree attainment two to four years after expected high school graduation. Further, there are significant impacts on students' college **enrollment and degree attainment outcomes** through six years after expected high school graduation.

45%

of participants in Early College High School programs had earned a postsecondary degree within six years of high school graduation, compared with **34%** of non-participants.²

Postsecondary Education

While postsecondary education is key to obtaining stable employment, rising costs have made it more difficult for families and students—particularly those from underrepresented groups—to afford. Policymakers need high-quality research and evaluation to identify successful practices that increase educational access, and to coordinate K-12 preparation with postsecondary needs.

AIR's [Center for Applied Research in Postsecondary Education](#) works directly with postsecondary institutions and other organizations to tackle some of postsecondary education's most pressing challenges. Notable projects include seven lessons learned on [tracking student outcomes and labor force participation](#) after they **complete postsecondary education** and a brief exploring training pathways to “middle skills,” which represent the **greatest unmet labor demand**.

>> For more information on AIR's education work, please visit: <https://www.air.org/topic/education>

² <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Lasting-Benefits-Early-College-High-Schools-Brief-Feb-2020.pdf>



Improving Health Care Outcomes and Access

Our research and evaluation experts study the implementation and effectiveness of health and well-being initiatives and programs to provide much-needed evidence to inform the field.

Addressing the Opioid Epidemic

The misuse of and addiction to opioids—including prescription pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl—is a national crisis. Promising approaches include addressing the problem of substance use disorders holistically, focusing on broader factors such as housing, living wage jobs, educational opportunities, and social connection.

128 people
die from an opioid overdose in the U.S. every day.³

- **[Center for Addiction Research and Effective Solutions \(AIR CARES\)](#)**
This AIR center brings together practitioners and researchers across the fields of medicine, public health, health services, education, criminal justice, workforce, and behavioral health to prevent and reduce the negative consequences of substance misuse.
 - [AIR facilitated Community Data Interpretation sessions](#) in partnership with the State of Tennessee Department of Health to **develop preliminary plans to shape the strategic direction for intervention activities.**
 - AIR led and evaluated a project for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality [to train rural Oklahoma primary care clinicians](#) to **identify and treat patients with opioid use disorders** using [medication-assisted treatment](#).

Plain Language Health Information

Accurate, accessible, and easy to understand health information is important all of the time, but has been particularly essential to help people stay safe and healthy, understand federal safety guidelines, and

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html>



prevent unnecessary fear during the pandemic. Understanding that many Americans have low literacy skills, AIR developed a [plain-language FAQ](#) to address a variety of topics related to COVID-19 in three languages (English, Spanish, and simplified Chinese).

9 out of 10

adults struggle to understand and use health information when it is unfamiliar, complex or jargon-filled.⁴

Telehealth's Role in Expanding Access to Care

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the use of telehealth helped to expand access to care for people in areas with few health care providers. Now, with social distancing guidelines related to the coronavirus pandemic, telehealth services can be a safer alternative to in-person visits.

43.5%

of Medicare primary care visits were provided through telehealth in April 2020, compared with less than **one percent** in February 2020.⁵

- [The Promise of Telehealth for Addressing COVID-19](#)

AIR has developed a brief explaining telehealth and examining its **promise as a health services solution** during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [The Expansion of Telehealth: Equity Considerations for Policymakers, Providers & Payers](#)

This issue brief, a collaboration between AIR and IMPAQ, an AIR subsidiary, explores how to **expand telehealth, considerations for specific patient populations, digital literacy**, and more.

>> For more information on AIR's health work, please visit: <https://www.air.org/topic/health>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/shareinteract/TellOthers.html>

⁵ <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/07/28/hhs-issues-new-report-highlighting-dramatic-trends-in-medicare-beneficiary-telehealth-utilization-amid-covid-19.html>



Developing a Workforce for the Future

AIR studies human performance and workforce development programs and works with government agencies, professional associations, and the private sector to help develop a workforce that is ready for the jobs of the 21st century.

Occupational Licensing

Occupational licensing aims to protect public safety but also can become a barrier to employment, particularly for economically disadvantaged or justice-involved individuals, or those moving to a different state.

AIR worked with the National Conference of State Legislatures and its partner organizations to conduct [case studies](#) of 11 different states that had reviewed their licensing practices. The resulting case studies provide **important background and lessons learned** that could be applied to future efforts to address licensing.

Disability and Rehabilitation

People with disabilities can have greater challenges than those who do not have disabilities in finding jobs and careers and remaining employed. For instance, AIR research has found that across major metropolitan areas, people with disabilities earn [63 cents to the dollar](#) compared with people who do not have disabilities. AIR's work in this area focuses in creating career pathways, pursuing employment opportunities, and gaining economic security for people with disabilities.

1 in 4

people in the American workforce has some form of disability.⁶

- [Creating Access to Successful Employment in Kentucky](#)

AIR conducted both **implementation and outcome evaluations** of Kentucky's response to meeting the training and employment needs of individuals with disabilities within a career pathway framework: Creating Access to Successful Employment (Project CASE).

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>



- **Transition Work-Based Learning Model in Maine**

AIR **evaluated two programs that serve students with disabilities:**

Jobs for Maine Graduates, which supports middle and high school students as they prepare for college and careers, and Progressive Employment, which expands vocational rehabilitation relationships with employers through community-based strategies.

- **Disability Employment and Marketplace in Boston and Other Top Metropolitan Areas**

AIR created two briefs to help inform employers in major metropolitan areas about the workforce challenges people with disabilities face.

The [first brief](#) explores the **pay gap**, while the [second brief](#) examines the **purchasing power** of people with disabilities.

>> For more information on AIR's workforce projects, please visit:

<https://www.air.org/topic/workforce>

