

EdTech Quality Indicators and the 5Es Benchmarks: Crosswalk Document

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1. Purpose of this crosswalk

This document provides a crosswalk between the EdTech Quality Collaborative (EQC) Five EdTech Quality Indicators and the 5Es Benchmarks for Evaluating EdTech Evidence.

The EQC indicators are an important industry-led quality standard for practical EdTech procurement and review in the United States. The 2026 guide published by Digital Promise [1] was produced by six leading sector organisations - 1EdTech, CAST, CoSN, Digital Promise, ISTE and SETDA - and is explicitly designed to help American schools and districts structure procurement, data governance, piloting and implementation. Its five indicators are Safe, Evidence-Based, Inclusive, Usable and Interoperable. The guide combines established U.S. quality signals and third-party validations, including ESSA-aligned evidence, accessibility requirements, privacy standards and interoperability certifications. As such, the EQC indicators can be understood as the only industry-developed consensus and procurement framework that brings bringing widely used U.S. standards and validation signals into one accessible decision structure for districts. The indicators are practically implemented in the EdTech Index that lists EdTech tools in K12 used in USA according to their certifications in the five areas.

The 5Es are international, research-based benchmarks designed to evaluate EdTech evidence holistically across five dimensions: Efficacy, Effectiveness, Equity, Ethics and Environment. The 5Es emerged from a major international research effort that reviewed 74 different frameworks used to evaluate EdTech and synthesised the indicators of 65 frameworks concerned with learning outcomes. Across all the frameworks, five recurring dimensions of convergence were identified: efficacy, effectiveness, equity, ethics and environment. Subsequently, researchers at the University of Stavanger and International Centre for EdTech Impact undertook five systematic reviews focused on each of the dimensions [2] and developed rubrics and indicators of quality for each based on a cross-sectoral Delphi study. Two academic publications tested and consolidated the dimensions and evidence indicators in peer-reviewed journals [3;4].

EduEvidence adopted the five dimensions and translated the quality indicators into practical benchmarks for evaluating EdTech based on three levels (weights of evidence) - Bronze, Silver and Gold. These levels are used for evaluating EdTech tools and cataloguing them in the EduEvidence global catalogue of evidence-based EdTech tools.

2. Crosswalk of individual criteria/indicators

There is substantial overlap between the two approaches, especially around evidence, inclusion and safety as key quality indicators of impactful EdTech tools. The EQC indicators foreground procurement readiness, usability, technical interoperability and U.S. compliance signals. The 5Es foreground the quality and breadth of evidence about learning, implementation, distributional effects, responsible design and environmental sustainability. (Note that Environment has no direct equivalent among the five EQC indicators).

EQC indicator	Corresponding 5Es indicators	Overlap and additionality
Safe EQC definition: Adheres to industry standards, data minimisation and data transparency to protect user privacy and prevent data breaches.	• Ethics - very strong alignment. Both address privacy, responsible data practices, transparency and the protection of learners. The EQC guide operationalises these through legal, privacy and security requirements and recognised third-party validations. • Equity - partial alignment. Safety can have unequal consequences across learner groups, particularly where AI bias, profiling or access to redress differs.	Overlap: Both EQC Safe and the 5Es Ethics dimension address privacy, responsible data practices, transparency and protection of learners. EQC safety requirements also overlap partly with 5Es Equity where risks such as AI bias, profiling or unequal access to redress may affect learner groups differently. What the 5Es add: A broader ethical assessment beyond privacy and security compliance, including informed consent and assent, child rights, transparency of automated decision-making, learner autonomy and wellbeing, responsible AI governance, and identification of unintended harms.
Evidence-Based EQC definition: Grounded in rigorous research, educational standards and empirical validation aligned with ESSA Tiers of Evidence.	• Efficacy - very strong alignment. Both frameworks ask whether credible evidence demonstrates that a solution can produce intended learning outcomes. The EQC guide makes the U.S. ESSA evidence hierarchy central to this indicator. • Effectiveness - strong alignment. EQC also asks whether expected outcomes are likely for the intended student population and later encourages districts to assess pilot impact and user experience. This moves beyond efficacy toward real-world effectiveness.	Overlap: EQC Evidence-Based overlaps strongly with 5Es Efficacy because both require credible evidence that a solution produces intended learning outcomes. It also overlaps with 5Es Effectiveness where evidence concerns outcomes for intended populations and performance in real-world use. What the 5Es add: An explicit distinction between efficacy and effectiveness. The 5Es assess not only whether a product works under controlled or study conditions, but whether it continues to work across authentic settings, schools, countries, languages, implementation models and learner populations.
Inclusive EQC definition: Prioritises accessibility and equitable design for diverse students, mitigating algorithmic bias and stereotypes.	• Equity - very strong alignment. Accessibility, learner variability, bias and design for diverse users sit directly within the 5Es Equity benchmark. • Ethics - strong alignment. Algorithmic bias, stereotypes and cognitive or emotional risks from AI are also ethical questions concerning fairness, dignity and responsible design. • Effectiveness - partial alignment. If learners cannot access or meaningfully use a product,	Overlap: EQC Inclusive overlaps very strongly with 5Es Equity through accessibility, learner variability, bias mitigation and design for diverse users. It also overlaps with 5Es Ethics through fairness, dignity, stereotypes and algorithmic bias, and partly with Effectiveness because barriers to access or meaningful use constrain real-world impact. What the 5Es add: A wider distributional analysis of who benefits, who does not, and under what conditions. This includes differences in outcomes and opportunities by language,

	real-world effectiveness will be constrained even where average impact is positive.	disability/specific needs, gender, socioeconomic status, geography and other contextual factors, alongside affordability, cultural and linguistic relevance, representation and participation in design.
Usable EQC definition: Focuses on intuitive design to ensure a seamless digital experience and eliminate technical barriers for teachers and students.	• Effectiveness - strong but not complete alignment. Usability, teacher workload, onboarding and classroom fit are critical determinants of whether an EdTech intervention can work in practice. • Equity - partial alignment. Poor usability can create disproportionate barriers for learners with accessibility needs, limited digital literacy, low bandwidth or limited teacher support.	Overlap: EQC Usable overlaps with 5Es Effectiveness because usability, teacher workload, onboarding, implementation burden and classroom fit affect whether an EdTech solution can work in practice. It also overlaps partly with Equity where poor usability creates disproportionate barriers for learners with accessibility needs, limited digital literacy, low bandwidth or limited teacher support. Note that these dimensions are also part of the Viability benchmark used by EduEvidence. What the 5Es add: A broader pedagogical conception of effectiveness. Beyond ease of use, the 5Es examine the quality of learning enabled, including curriculum goals, learner agency and co-agency, self- and co-regulation, interactivity, higher-order thinking, meaningful learning and appropriate personal support.
Interoperable EQC definition: Utilises open data standards to connect with existing district technologies and securely aggregate instructional data.	• Effectiveness - partial alignment. Integration with LMS, SIS, rostering and data systems can determine whether a product can be implemented reliably and whether outcomes can be monitored in real settings. • Ethics - partial alignment. Secure aggregation and exchange of instructional data create responsibilities around privacy, governance, access and appropriate secondary use.	Overlap: EQC Interoperable overlaps partly with 5Es Effectiveness because integration with LMS, SIS, rostering and data systems can affect reliable implementation and outcome monitoring. It also overlaps partly with 5Es Ethics because secure data exchange raises questions of privacy, governance, access and appropriate secondary use. What the 5Es add: An evaluative layer focused on what integrated data are used for, whether analytics support meaningful learning, whether data use is ethically justified, and whether interoperability contributes to better outcomes. The 5Es also assess dimensions outside interoperability itself, including learning impact, equity, ethics and environmental sustainability.

3. How the 5Es are different

The EQC indicators cover several important dimensions of EdTech quality, but they cannot provide a substitute for the 5Es given the missing elements. This is understandable since the 5Es were developed through a synthesis of the available EdTech quality and evidence frameworks and therefore subsume many of the EQC indicators within a broader framework.

The EQC framework includes useful questions about measurable outcomes, usability, implementation and instructional alignment, but its five top-level indicators do not contain a dedicated pedagogical effectiveness domain. The 5Es distinguish evidence of impact from the quality of the learning processes through which impact is produced, including learner agency, higher-order thinking, meaningful interaction, personal support and the fit between product design and educational purpose.

EQC Safe provides a strong privacy and security foundation, and Inclusive addresses some AI-related harms. The 5Es Ethics benchmark extends the analysis to the wider moral and governance implications of EdTech: autonomy, consent, transparency, child rights, wellbeing, human oversight, responsible AI, data justice and unintended consequences.

EQC Inclusive strongly addresses accessibility, learner variability and bias. The 5Es Equity benchmark additionally asks whether benefits and burdens are distributed fairly in practice, including differential outcomes, affordability, infrastructure constraints, cultural and linguistic relevance, representation and exclusion across international contexts.

The five EQC indicators do not include a dedicated environmental criterion that asks whether a solution is environmentally sustainable, including the impacts associated with devices, infrastructure, energy use, data processing, replacement cycles and e-waste. This dimension is becoming increasingly material for AI-enabled EdTech and other cloud-intensive products.

4. Recommended use

Based on this analysis, the strongest areas of convergence between EQC indicators and the 5Es benchmarks are Evidence-Based/Efficacy, Inclusive/Equity and Safe/Ethics. Where 5Es has additionality is Environment, broader pedagogical Effectiveness, and wider ethical and equity analysis.

The EQC indicators provide a practical first-line quality and procurement screen for U.S. districts. The 5Es then provide a broader research-based evaluation of the product and its evidence, including dimensions that procurement standards alone cannot establish and they require qualified experts' and researchers' review.

References

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