

The right evidence for improving education

VCOSS submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the national education evidence base

October 2016



About VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS members reflect the diversity of the sector and include large charities, peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups, and individuals interested in social policy. In addition to supporting the sector, VCOSS represents the interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians in policy debates and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society.

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VCOSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country and pays its respects to Elders past and present.

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Executive summary

VCOSS supports developing a national education evidence base. Good evidence can inform educational practice by providing meaningful information. This can drive change in policies, practices and programs, resulting in improved wellbeing and educational outcomes for children and young people, particularly those facing disadvantage. Better data collection and sharing can help monitor individual children and young people's progress, prompting timely interventions and helping services better cater for students' needs.

Inequality is driving Australian children's educational achievement differences. Improving education evidence provides an opportunity to better understand the effects of disadvantage and design better responses. It can assist using education funding to greatest effect, including equity based funding.

The education evidence base can be holistic and capture information about children and young people's development from birth to adulthood, including the many factors influencing their health and wellbeing.

Children and young people, families and carers, the education sector, health and community services, and different levels of government, can be equal partners in developing and using education evidence. Bipartisan support and sustained commitment from federal, state and territory governments can increase the durability of educational data collection and research.

VCOSS supports the Productivity Commission's proposal to create a consolidated educational database and improve data sharing in the best interests of children and young people. The database can be accessible for all service users. Data linkage can be expanded, providing a more comprehensive examination of factors contributing to children and young people's education and wellbeing, and prompt timely interventions.

VCOSS supports filling gaps in data and evidence, including measuring the impact of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and schools on student's progress, and measuring students' wellbeing and non-cognitive skills. There are other opportunities to address gaps, including:

- expanding data and evidence on disadvantage to better understand its nature and identify the most effective strategies and interventions in different circumstances;
- collecting data on disengagement and alternate education to design interventions and responses; and
- documenting the perspectives of children and young people.

VCOSS supports commissioning high quality research, but believe professionals and local communities can also be supported to gather robust data and evidence. We support the

development of a centralised data repository and coordination of the national education evidence so data and evidence can be easily accessed by federal, state and territory governments, across sectors and communities. This will mean they can better understand what is driving educational disadvantage and take actions to address this. We encourage mapping existing datasets to enhance existing data collections, reduce duplication and clarify their purpose. Timely feedback can improve transparency and accountability.

VCOSS welcomes a focus on translating evidence into practice. Providing practical tools and resources can improve outcomes. Community sector organisations, professionals and educators working with children and young people can be supported to locally embed new practices, and can be active partners in prioritising research and identifying the data and evidence for collection. Where evidence is clear, governments can mandate best practice.

Recommendations

Create purposeful, holistic and durable evidence

- Target evidence development toward reducing unequal outcomes with better practice
- Track individual children and young people's progress to help services better cater to their needs and provide timely interventions
- Include evidence about children and young people's learning from birth to adulthood, across all developmental domains
- Capture the multitude factors influencing children and young people's education, health and wellbeing
- View all participants as equal partners in education evidence development and use
- Gain bipartisan support and sustained commitment from federal, state and territory governments

Improve data access and use

- Create a consolidated data repository accessible for all users
- Link data to provide stronger evidence for contributing factors and interventions improving children and young people's education and wellbeing
- Share information in the best interests of children and young people, by legislative change, stronger policy guidance and obtaining consent during data collection

Close data and evidence gaps

- Expand data and analysis of children and young people facing disadvantage to provide evidence of the most effective strategies and interventions
- Capture data and evidence on children and young people not in mainstream education, at risk of disengaging or have disengaged
- Capture data and evidence on children and young people's wellbeing and development from birth through to adulthood, including longitudinally
- Include children and young people's perspectives
- Measure ECEC or schools' effect on student progress
- Evaluate targeted interventions for children and young people at risk of poor educational outcomes or early school leaving

Improve research, data collection and reporting

- Commission high quality research, focused on practices having the greatest effect on children and young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.

- Resource professionals and local communities to gather robust data and evidence to supplement research evidence
- Develop the education evidence base with cross-sectoral engagement to drive and oversee research
- Map existing datasets to identify opportunities to enhance existing data, reduce duplication and ensure data collection provides value
- Provide timely feedback to people and organisations involved in collecting data
- Improve transparency and accountability on children and young people's results, particularly those facing disadvantage

Translate evidence into practice

- Develop practical tools and resources to help professionals translate evidence into practice
- Provide educators with professional development to locally embed new practices
- Actively engage educators prioritising research and identifying data types and evidence for collection
- Encourage governments to mandate evidence-based best practice

Create purposeful, holistic and durable evidence

Children and young people's educational outcomes are influenced by a wide range of factors. In addition to the formal educational environment, this includes their home environment and the conditions in which they are raised, peer and kinship networks and the services and supports that are available to them as they grow and develop. Good evidence can inform educational practice by providing meaningful information. This can drive change in policies, practices and programs, resulting in improved wellbeing and educational outcomes for children and young people, particularly those facing disadvantage.

Inequality is driving Australian children's educational achievement differences. Children from the most disadvantaged areas are twice as developmentally vulnerable than those from the most advantaged.¹ This trend continues throughout schooling. There are strong links between low achievement and educational disadvantage, especially among children from low socioeconomic and Aboriginal backgrounds, children with disabilities, those with low English proficiency and those living in remote areas.² At age 15, the performance gap between Australian students in the highest and lowest socioeconomic groups equates to around two-and-a-half years of schooling.³ Victorian students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to complete year 12.⁴

Good evidence helps educators understand the effects of disadvantage and informs better teaching. Robust data can direct education funding to greatest effect, including school equity funding.

¹ Commonwealth Government Department of Education and Training, *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2015*, Canberra, 2016.

² D Gonski, K Boston, K Greiner, C Lawrence, B Scales and P Tannock, *Review of Funding for Schooling: Final Report*, Canberra, December 2011, p. 111.

³ S Thomson, L De Bortoli, S Buckley, *PISA in Brief Highlights from the full Australian report: PISA 2012: How Australia measures up*, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2013, p.21.

⁴ Victorian Auditor-General's Report, *Student Completion Rates*, Victoria, 2012, p.18

Focus on driving change and reducing inequality

Recommendations

- Target evidence development toward reducing unequal outcomes with better practice
- Track individual children and young people's progress to help services better cater to their needs and provide timely interventions
- Include evidence about children and young people's learning from birth to adulthood, across all developmental domains
- Capture the multitude factors influencing children and young people's education, health and wellbeing

Overall, VCOSS endorses the Productivity Commission's (the Commission's) proposed framework. VCOSS welcomes the Commission's distinction between data and evidence, and moving beyond data collection to translating data into practice. While educational data must include monitoring and accountability, its focus should be driving systemic change for children and young people. It can be improved by more explicitly articulating its purpose and clarifying its intended audience.

Factors affecting children's learning and development appear from birth to adulthood. Capturing evidence and data throughout children's lives helps educators, health and community services and governments identify the best interventions for children to learn well, including for particular groups of children and young people.

VCOSS welcomes the intention to capture broader outcomes for children and young people, including non-cognitive capabilities and wellbeing. There are strong links between a child and young person's wellbeing, their social and emotional development and their educational achievement. A national evidence framework focusing on all developmental domains will be most effective, including children's social and emotional development, physical health and wellbeing, and language and cognitive development.

Ideally, holistic data sets would provide information on demographics, parental engagement in education, home learning environment, social and emotional wellbeing, health and local community characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, incidence of family violence, involvement in child protection, school attendance data, and involvement in the justice system. For instance, VCOSS members highlight the usefulness of data from the Dropping off the Edge report in identifying key characteristics of communities in a non-judgmental manner.

Better data across children and young people's developmental lifecourse are needed at a population level with the ability to examine sub-populations, as outlined above, in order to monitor actions and improvements over time. Additionally data needs to be available at a community and school levels to ensure community mobilisation around the factors that drive educational disadvantage. Many of these factors sit outside the educational system and can only be addressed through integrated school and community efforts.

Whilst many data are collected currently, there are large gaps across the life course. They are collected by different institutions and national and state and territory jurisdictions, with different levels of data aggregation and disaggregation, and availability for use across different sectors. Data linkage is also required between different population and administrative data sets to provide better evidence for research, policy and action.

There is also a need to have reliable census level data, such as the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). The AEDC enables disaggregation at a state and territory, sub-population, school and community level and has capacity for data linkage through collecting information that can link individuals to other datasets.

Survey or sample data can be important for exploring particular topic areas, but is limited by its ability to be disaggregated at sub-populations and smaller geographic levels. Census data are often more powerful, and survey or sample data should not be used to replace what is better collected through a census.

However, improved data collection and linkage could be used punitively, actively undermining children's wellbeing. VCOSS believes these uses should be explicitly prevented. For example, linked absenteeism data should not be used to restrict welfare payments or child support payments. Instead, a human rights framework should underpin educational evidence collection and use, recognising the every child's right to a quality education. Evidence collection and dissemination should aim to enhance educational equity of access and inclusion to improve every child's learning and development. Increased data sharing and better evidence can improve outcomes for children and young people in two ways. It can drive systemic change through identifying better practices and reducing unequal outcomes. It can also be used to monitor the progress of individual children and young people, to enable timely interventions and to help services better cater to student needs.

View all participants as equal partners

Recommendations

- View all participants as equal partners in education evidence development and use
- Gain bipartisan support and sustained commitment from federal, state and territory governments

The framework should treat all relevant participants as equal partners in education evidence development and use. This includes children and young people, families and carers, the education sector, health and community services, the professionals who work in these services, and all levels of government. While the Commission mentions all these groups, it gives less attention to parents and carers, children and young people, and health and community services.

The health and community sector is a major stakeholder in requiring educational evidence. As many of the factors driving educational disadvantage reside outside the educational system, they are a major partner in addressing the root causes of disadvantage and can assist in providing

solutions. Take for example the successful Youth Connections program that was discontinued by the Federal Government in 2014. Run by community sector organisations, Youth Connections supported around 4,600 vulnerable young people in Victoria each year to reengage back to school or other education and training and was highly successful in preventing and addressing disengagement from school. Make data collections durable

Bipartisan support is required for a durable and effective national education evidence base. VCOSS members are concerned substantial effort can be expended in establishing an institution, but changes in governments' priorities may result in the collection not being maintained or adequately resourced over time, limiting its value.

Creating linked datasets relies on consistent datasets across jurisdictions. State and territory governments must collaborate to make changes to state-based data sets and privacy legislation.

Improve data access and use

Improve data access and expand linkages

Recommendations

- Create a consolidated data repository accessible for all users
- Link data to provide stronger evidence for contributing factors and interventions improving children and young people's education and wellbeing.

VCOSS endorses the creation of a consolidated data repository to improve access for data users. The multiplicity of data-holding agencies creates difficulty locating meaningful or holistic information. A consolidated repository can produce data in easy-to-interpret formats, and generate customised data for local communities and data users. For example, local community-level data can help inform place-based responses to reduce educational participation barriers.

Where possible, data sources should be better connected to provide stronger evidence for contributing factors and interventions improving children and young people's education and wellbeing. The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) ⁵ and Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System⁶ are useful existing tool, but do not link well with other data sources, such as On Track Destination Data, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) or the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). VCOSS notes data linkage improvements are already underway, and encourages exploring further opportunities.

Data linkage can yield useful longitudinal data, helping track individual progress. Education providers and community services face difficulty retrieving student's educational histories. Improving access helps identify issues and intervene early.

The unique student identifier (USI) can help track student progress, particularly for transient families who move more frequently between services. Good evidence helps drive practice change and allows services to better cater to student's individual needs. For instance by informing Individual Learning Support Plans, and helping identify those children and young people who would most benefit from early interventions.

If implemented, the USI can capture data spanning developmental domains, including education and wellbeing. For greatest benefit, education providers and community services need to be accurate and consistent when recording student information, and actively use information to identify and support students.

⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *Australian Early Development Census*, 2014, <https://www.aedc.gov.au/communities>, accessed 24 June 2015.

⁶ Department of Education and Training, *Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System (VCAMS)*, 2015, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/research/pages/vcams.aspx>, accessed 24 June 2015.

Improve data sharing

Recommendation

- Share information in the best interests of children and young people, by legislative change, stronger policy guidance and obtaining consent during data collection.

Data should be shared when it is in the best interests of the child or young person. Community sector organisations experience difficulty obtaining information from education providers and government departments. Education providers can face challenges sharing information as children and young people move between different services.

Often, a student's information does not follow them from one institution to another. Data sharing allows children, young people and their families to only tell their story once, rather than repeating it, and can help children and young people manage successful transitions between services. This includes between ECEC, primary and secondary schools, and other education providers, including alternative education. Greater information sharing between education and community service can help provide holistic services to vulnerable learners and promotes early identification and intervention, before issues escalate. Data sharing requires working between multiple state and territory government agencies, community organisations, and across tiers of government.

VCOSS generally endorses changing privacy legislation to increase consistency of information use and disclosure. Data owners should bear responsibility to release data unless there is a good reason not to. VCOSS members report data owners may be reluctant to share information due to uncertainty, rather than actual legislative barriers. For greatest effect, any legislative change must be accompanied by clear departmental guidelines and consistent policies to achieve cultural change.

Data sharing is easier if consent for sharing is obtained from families at the outset. Gaining consent poses difficulties, but VCOSS members report people can overcome their reluctance when the benefits are explained. By viewing children, young people and families as partners, and providing them greater data ownership could encourage participation in data collection and giving consent to sharing.

Close data and evidence gaps

Expand equity analysis capabilities

Recommendations

- Expand data and analysis of children and young people facing disadvantage to provide evidence of the most effective strategies and interventions
- Capture data and evidence on children and young people not in mainstream education, at risk of disengaging or have disengaged

Analyse marginalisation

Wellbeing and educational data and evidence has gaps in measuring the performance of marginalised groups of children and young people. In particular, VCOSS members identify data gaps for:

- children in out-of-home-care or involved in child protection
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially refugees and asylum seekers
- same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people
- children with chronic illness
- children with additional health and development needs (AHDN)⁷ including children with particular types of disability such as complex communication needs

While some data is available, data and evidence collection can be expanded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and children in rural and regional areas.

Enhanced data collection is only a first step. More evidence can help educators more deeply understand the nature of marginalisation and identify the most effective strategies and interventions for children and young people in different circumstances.

Evidence collection and dissemination can avoid labelling or stigmatising groups, and instead focus on understanding the determinants of educational performance and wellbeing. For example, instead of merely identifying higher disadvantage for children in single parent families, good

⁷ Students with additional health and development needs are those who have or are at increased risk of a chronic physical, developmental, behavioural or emotional condition and who require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally. A key feature of this definition is it is inclusive and can be applied to children with severe and complex conditions, as well as to children experiencing emerging developmental issues who may lack a formal diagnosis. Around 20 per cent of students have additional health and development needs.

research can identify the characteristics present in the subset of single parent families correlated with poor performance, such as financial and emotional stress.

Collect evidence of disengagement from mainstream education

Data and evidence gaps exist for children and young people not in formal education, such as alternative education settings or home schooling. Data can identify the different education settings where children and young people learn, including differentiating between flexible learning options in mainstream schools and community settings, or identifying young people enrolled in vocational education and training.

Data and evidence on children and young people disengaged from education could help identify factors causing early school leaving and help retain students in education. Real-time data can allow timely responses to guide individual young people back into a suitable education program. For example, reliable data on absenteeism can identify and assist children and young people with additional needs or are at risk of early school leaving.

Record wellbeing and development

Recommendation

- Capture data and evidence on children and young people's wellbeing and development from birth through to adulthood, including longitudinally

While useful measurement tools exist for wellbeing and developmental domains, such as the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) and the AEDC, none exists for measuring developmental progress from birth to secondary school completion. While the AEDC is a national census collected every three years, the MDI is only being used in South Australia and some communities in Victoria. This gap should be filled to have nationally consistent wellbeing and development data across the life course.

Longitudinal data helps assess long-term outcomes and effectiveness of specific interventions. It complement other data sources, providing more immediate, short-term results. Greater Australian longitudinal research investment examining children and young people's development can create richer data sources. Providing sufficient funding to the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children and the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children can allow establishing new cohorts of children at regular intervals.

Collect children and young people's perspectives

Recommendation

- Include children and young people's perspectives.

Children and young people's perspectives help understand their lives better. Children and young people give context for quantitative data, can test research assumptions and help explain why some practices are effective in ineffective and identify improvements. Multiple approaches can provide avenues for this research, such as undertaking qualitative research and in-depth interviews with children and young people, as well as using tools measuring children and young people's views. A good example is the Middle Years Development Instrument.

Middle Years Development Instrument⁸

The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) is a population-level measure of children aged 8-14, covering non-academic factors relevant to learning and participation. The MDI is a self-report survey asking children how they think and feel about their experiences both inside and outside of school. The survey covers five areas of development, including social and emotional development, connectedness, school experiences, physical health and wellbeing and constructive use of after-school time.

MDI results are reported at school, community and state level. It provides valuable data to inform helps schools and communities to tailor the services offered, to best meet the needs of their students and inform communities planning place-based initiatives. It is a useful tool for capturing meaningful data on the progress and effectiveness of local initiatives. The MDI tool was developed in Canada, but has since been adapted for use in Australia. It has since been trialled in regional and metropolitan South Australia and in two areas of Victoria; Whittlesea and North Frankston.

The Local Government Area of Whittlesea, in collaboration with the Whittlesea Youth Commitment (WYC) trialled the MDI with 936 Grade 5 students in 2013 and with 628 Year 8 students in 2014. For participating schools, the survey results provided valuable insight into students' wellbeing, highlighting areas of both strength and weakness. For example, one school found its low attendance in extracurricular activities was not due to a lack of interest, but because of transport issues and clashing timetables. As a result of this feedback, the school realigned its services to enable greater numbers of students to attend.

⁸ Middle Years Development Instrument Australia, Op. Cit.

Evaluate targeted interventions and value-added measures

Recommendations

- Measure ECEC or schools' effect on student progress
- Evaluate targeted interventions for children and young people at risk of poor educational outcomes or early school leaving

Measuring the impact ECEC or schools have on student's progress, taking into account their background and prior learning, provides better information on their effectiveness. Current point-in-time measures such as NAPLAN are unable to separate progress from ability, and fail to recognise hard-won improvements from a low base, or when confronted by difficult circumstances.

VCOSS members express frustration at the preponderance of pilots and one-off programs executed without robust evaluation. Comprehensive evaluations can be embedded in programs and pilots to drive continuous improvement and inform their expansion. Evaluations require baseline or control sample comparators to determine the intervention's effectiveness.

Too often, evaluations do not identify projects' success factors, challenges, or lessons learnt for improvement. This detail is required for educators to assess whether a similar project might work in another setting.

Improve research, data collection and reporting

Undertake meaningful research

Recommendations

- Commission high quality research, focused on practices having the greatest effect on children and young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.
- Resource professionals and local communities to gather robust data and evidence to supplement research evidence
- Develop the national education evidence base, with cross-sectoral engagement to drive and oversee research

Prioritise education equity in research

Commissioning Australian education research can strengthen the evidence on improving outcomes for children and young people. While international evidence is useful, it can have limited transferability. More Australian research can address practical questions, not only theory. With so many research possibilities, funding can prioritise research with the greatest effect on children and young people, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. Research can focus on developing a deeper understanding of the causes of poor educational attainment and ways to address it.

Employ diverse, robust methodologies

High quality research and rigorous assessment can determine the effectiveness of specific interventions and inform policy and practice. However, VCOSS members warn against limiting research to randomised controlled trials. Many research methodologies are robust, and the most appropriate research methodology can be selected according to the needs of a particular study. In particular, VCOSS members emphasise the value of mixed method design, combining quantitative and in-depth qualitative data.

VCOSS members support conducting small scale research to help determine the effectiveness of interventions and using samples rather than relying solely on population measures, to explore particular topic areas. However, as noted above, survey or sample data should not be used to replace what is better collected through a census.

VCOSS members advocate combining a top-down' monitoring and performance benchmarking of the education system with 'bottom-up' approaches generating evidence about what works best. The 'bottom-up' approach should encourage professionals and local communities to gather robust

data and evidence, such as in trials and small scale samples, to supplement the evidence base. Evidence generation should not be limited to government agencies and research bodies.

Develop the national education evidence base

There are many institutions undertaking research related to educational outcomes. Many of the research findings are difficult to find or access. Investment in the national education evidence base is needed and VCOSS endorses developing processes to identify research priorities, commission high-quality education research and disseminate evidence. Any research decisions can have strong engagement from the education sector, including ECEC and schools across government, independent and catholic schools; the community sector; families and advocates to maximise its application.

Enhance data collection and accessibility

Recommendation

- Map existing dataset to identify opportunities to enhance existing data, reduce duplication and ensure data collection provides value

Education providers and health and community services must often provide the same information to multiple agencies. By avoiding duplication, data sets can reduce the administrative burden on organisations, as well as on children, young people and families. To achieve this, VCOSS encourages auditing and mapping existing data sets to link and expand them. This is preferable to creating new collections. For example, the AEDC is a valued tool for measuring early childhood development.

Data collection with a clear purpose is more valuable. Sometimes accountability data is collected without adequately capturing the effects of interventions. This wastes opportunities to produce valuable information. Data quality can be compromised if those collecting data are not informed about its purpose or use. Education providers may be reluctant to participate in research or data collection when they cannot see its value. Articulating a clear purpose can help overcome this attitude.

Use reporting for transparency and feedback

Recommendations

- Provide timely feedback to people and organisations involved in collecting data
- Improve transparency and accountability on children and young people's results, particularly those facing disadvantage

Providing fast, reliable data directly to people and organisations can maximise opportunities for change. Providing timely feedback to schools, ECEC and community services can empower educators to understand the impact of current practices and drive change. Providing data to children and young people can be motivational and empower them to take greater ownership of their learning. Providing feedback to families can engage parents in their child's learning and help galvanise their data collection participation.

Data collection can improve transparency and accountability, including to children, young people and their families, education providers, health and community services, the broader community and government. In particular, better accountability mechanisms in education can engage children and young people facing disadvantage. For instance, requiring schools to report and act on school absenteeism, school expulsions and early school leaving, can result in faster and more frequent interventions.

Data owners can regularly and publicly report progress in improving children and young people's outcomes, including measuring the performance of different equity groups. This information can help identify future research priorities.

Translate evidence into practice

Data and evidence is of little value if it does not translate into policy and practice. This requires effectively communicating findings to educators and explaining their practical consequences. Already stretched educators cannot proactively research and embed new practices unaided. Similarly, community services require accessible information for program development and local place-based responses. Useful evidence already exists, but too often does not affect practice due to limited awareness or resource shortages.

Clearly communicate findings

Recommendation

- Develop practical tools and resources to help professionals translate evidence into practice

Clearly communicating evidence to education and community service professionals can help overcome their time and resource shortages. Information presented in jargon-free, easily understood formats, can identify tangible actions, including outlining effective strategies and interventions in different circumstances. Developing practical tools and resources for professionals, such as practice guides, helps translate this evidence into practice.

Provide professional development

Recommendation

- Provide educators with professional development to locally embed new practices

Professional development can help educators understand and locally embed new practices. This exceeds merely making resources available or developing online training and includes face-to-face instruction. With dedicated time, educators can engage with research and develop their skills.

Local practice experts can work with schools or ECEC providers to interpret research and translate its findings. Facilitating communities of practice for collaborative professional learning, sharing best practice and lessons learnt can further assist.

Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat⁹

The Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat was established in 2004. Under this initiative, highly skilled and experienced educators work directly with schools and school boards across the province to build capacity and implement strategies to improve our students' reading, writing and math skills. These specialists work with schools to:

- identify ways to improve student achievement
- provide professional learning opportunities to teachers, principals and other educators
- share research on effective teaching and successful practices
- provide schools with information and clarification regarding the Ministry of Education's legislation, policies, programs and literacy and numeracy strategies
- build partnerships between schools, teachers' federations, faculties of education and other organisations.

Actively engage professionals

Recommendation

- Actively engage educators prioritising research and identifying data types and evidence for collection.

Change is made easier by establishing collaborative relationships with educators. Engaging educators in identifying data and evidence of most benefit to their work, and prioritising research helps build a shared vision of progress. Data collection is often perceived as a compliance requirement, rather than an opportunity for improving children and young people's outcomes.

Explaining data collection's purpose and providing timely feedback to educators helps prompt them to act on the information. Too often, educators do not receive results, or receive them when no longer useful. Equally, research communication often fails to convey the implications for changing practice to deliver benefits for children and young people.

⁹ Ontario Ministry of Education, *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/index.html>, accessed 6 October 2016.

Mandate best practice

Recommendation

- Encourage governments to mandate evidence-based best practice

Where evidence is clear, governments can mandate best practice, accompanied by clear guidance and professional learning to support change. VCOSS members observe the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care, and outside school hours care, have improved practice. Education evidence can inform and extend this model, particularly within schools. This can be achieved by taking collaborative approach to influence change in all sectors, including government, Catholic and independent schools.

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