

Guidance report

Leveraging evidence for system support

March 2026



The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) is Australia's national education evidence body, working to achieve excellence and equity in educational outcomes for all children and young people.

Acknowledgement

AERO's work is made possible by the joint funding it receives from Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

The authors would like to thank the many educational professionals across Australia who have provided support and feedback on drafts of this guidance. In particular, we would like to thank the members of the Project Advisory Group consisting of Education system and sector leaders from every state and territory and the Commonwealth. It is through their deep engagement, frank feedback and ongoing partnership that we were able to test and iterate advice developed in its entirety to support them in their work.

AERO would like to thank those who provided expert review of this report:

- Emeritus Professor Bill Loudon AM, University of Western Australia
- Dr Jordana Hunter, Program Director, Education at McKinnon
- Professor Mark Rickinson, Monash University
- AERO First Nations Expert Reference Group members.

AERO would also like to thank the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), authors of the systematic review which underpins this guidance report.

Acknowledgement of Country

AERO acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands, waterways, skies, islands and sea Country across Australia. We pay our deepest respects to First Nations cultures and Elders past and present. We endeavour to continually value and learn from First Nations knowledges and educational practices.

Authors

Rosey Lind, Carlie Davis and Ben Heenan

Copyright

All material presented in this publication is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](#), except for:

- photographs
- the organisation's logo, branding and trademarks
- content or material provided by third parties, where CC BY 4.0 permissions have not been granted.

You may copy, distribute and adapt the publication, as long as you attribute the Australian Education Research Organisation Limited ACN 644 853 369, ABN 83 644 853 369 (AERO), and abide by the other licence terms.

How to cite

Lind, R., Davis, C., & Heenan, B. (2026). *Leveraging evidence for system support: Guidance report*. Australian Education Research Organisation. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/research-reports/leveraging-evidence-system-support>

Publication details

ISBN 978-1-923066-70-0 (online)

Cover image: AERO

Contents

Summary	5
---------	---

Introduction	6
--------------	---

Part 1: How systems can support the adoption of evidence-based practices in schools	11
Element 1: Principles for system effectiveness	12
Element 2: Levers for system support to schools	15
Element 3: Enabling conditions for system support	26

Part 2: A process for new or time-bound system-led initiatives	31
Defining the initiative	32
Planning	33
Enactment	34
Monitoring and evaluation	35

Conclusion	36
-------------------	-----------

References	37
-------------------	-----------

Figures

Figure 1: Elements of system support for adopting evidence-based practices in schools	10
Figure 2: Process for new system-led initiatives	10
Figure 3: Alignment between implementation context and policy content	12
Figure 4: Coherent technical core	15
Figure 5: School improvement ecosystem	17
Figure 6: Process for new system-led initiatives	30

Summary

Teaching is the single most powerful in-school influence on student outcomes. This report focuses specifically on how education systems can support schools in taking up and sustaining evidence-based teaching practices effectively. This report does not attempt to cover every aspect of system work. Instead, it concentrates on the functions most directly tied to supporting schools in taking up and sustaining evidence-based practices. It brings together insights from behavioural science, public policy and implementation research, translated into the language and levers of system work in the Australian education context. The report highlights that systems often have most of the required elements in place, but these elements do not always operate in unison. More importantly, while systems design policy, programs and/or initiatives, it is schools and teachers who enact them. Supporting schools as the primary site of implementation is therefore central to system success.

Key elements for systems to support the adoption of evidence in schools

Principles: The guiding mindsets or orientations that shape how a system approaches its work. They are not actions in themselves, but orient the way decisions are made, ensuring consistency, coherence and an evidence-informed foundation across all initiatives. In this report, the principles are clarity and alignment, effective use of evidence, and a focused system strategy.

Levers: The key functions or mechanisms through which systems act to support schools. These are the tangible ways systems can shape, align and resource their core responsibilities to enable effective implementation. In this report, the levers are the coherent technical core, the school improvement ecosystem, and service design and delivery.

Enabling conditions: The operational and relational factors that allow principles and levers to work in practice. They create the environment in which system support can be delivered effectively and sustained over time. In this report, the enabling conditions are leadership, data use and infrastructure, and effective communication and stakeholder engagement.

In addition to identifying what systems should prioritise, this report describes the next step by setting out a practical process for decision-making. It provides guidance for decision-making when introducing new initiatives, decommissioning existing ones or strengthening ongoing work. This process ensures priorities are enacted with a clear understanding of what it takes for schools to implement them successfully, while minimising duplication and unnecessary burden.

This report brings together evidence in a way that directly responds to the challenges identified by Australian systems. The intent is not to add new layers of activity, but to provide a framework that aligns existing work, reduces noise for schools and helps systems focus on what matters most for teaching and learning.

Introduction

Who this guidance report is for

This guidance report has been prepared for education system leaders and policymakers. System leaders may be employed by education system authorities across a range of functions, including policy, regulatory oversight or strategic, operational or pedagogical support for school leadership teams and networks. In Australia, a range of system leadership roles exist at state, territory or regional level, from executive roles to advisors working directly with teachers and school leaders.

The report defines an ‘education system’ as an authority directly overseeing the administration of multiple schools, with responsibility for workforce, curriculum, policy, funding, regulation and evaluation. In Australia’s federated structure, such systems include state or territory departments of education, state or diocesan Catholic education offices managing systemic schools or authorities responsible for multiple independent schools. Internationally, it includes other federated systems, such as district education authorities in the United States, as well as national systems where school administration occurs centrally, such as in the United Kingdom or New Zealand.

Implementation of what and by whom

Evidence-based practices are the practices most likely to improve learning outcomes for all students. These practices align with what we know about how students learn and include instructional approaches such as explicit teaching, formative assessment and mastery learning, as well as effective classroom management and family engagement. AERO’s model of learning and teaching brings together the teaching practices shown by rigorous research to be the most effective and efficient at supporting student learning.

Implementing these evidence-based teaching practices in schools, at scale, has the potential to benefit all Australian students. A deliberate and structured approach to implementation supports schools in integrating quality evidence into everyday teaching practice. Effective implementation involves teachers and school leaders applying this reliable, evidence-informed approach to tailor the implementation process to their context and sustain evidence-based practices at the whole-school level.

Why education is particularly challenging to improve

Achieving effective change in education systems is challenging. Unlike many other areas of public administration, schooling engages almost every child and family, every day, over more than a decade. Systematic improvement depends on the cumulative progress of each student, class, school and region across multiple years. This extended timeframe requires sustained relationships between the public and the education system, which intensifies the complexity and sensitivity of implementation (Mason, 2014). Political and community priorities often shift before the impact of initiatives can be realised, disrupting continuity and undermining improvement.

Past approaches to system initiatives have often struggled because they treated education as if it could be managed like other public service domains. Top-down programs that did not adequately consider the realities of classrooms and schools have led to patchy adoption, low fidelity and limited impact (Baan et al., 2023). Many initiatives have been ‘implementation-setting agnostic’, designed without considering the unique context of schools and teaching (Australian National Audit Office, 2014). The result has been cycles of reform that are repeatedly launched, abandoned and replaced, creating change fatigue, distrust and disengagement among teachers and leaders (McLure & Aldridge, 2022; Schleicher, 2024).

This work is designed to help systems navigate both ongoing improvement efforts and the immediate demands of new priorities. Without coherent, aligned and evidence-informed approaches, system-led initiatives risk confusing or overloading schools rather than supporting them. To avoid repeating past mistakes, system leaders need to understand what makes change in education systems unique, and place schools – the ultimate site of implementation – at the core of their system service design and delivery. This requires a sharper focus on change itself: how it occurs, what barriers can derail it, and what enables its success.



What we need to understand about change

To effectively respond to these challenges and opportunities, system leaders need a deeper understanding of how change occurs across different levels of the system. The evidence highlights 3 interrelated levels that must be considered: system, school and individual.



System level: Understand the broader context

- **Historical legacies:** Education systems are shaped by past reforms, cultural expectations and longstanding practices. These legacies influence schools' willingness to adopt new approaches and can either support or obstruct system efforts (Mason, 2014; Snyder, 2017). For First Nations communities, historical legacies can also include colonisation, exclusion from schooling and past system-led harms. Understanding what schools and communities have experienced before helps position new initiatives in ways that build rather than erode trust.
- **Relationships and networks:** Stakeholder relationships across systems act as accelerators or barriers. Strong relational networks between system leaders, schools and communities can help mobilise change, whereas weak or fragmented relationships undermine coherence (Schleicher, 2024; Wallace & Arredondo, 2022). Paying attention to relationships, including with diverse groups such as First Nations communities, reduces duplication and prevents schools from being overburdened.
- **Agility and readiness:** Education systems are complex and adaptive. Change rarely unfolds in a linear way, and readiness to act differs across contexts (Jackson et al., 2022; Koh & Askell-Williams, 2021). Leaders need to identify opportunities for progress, review existing practices and be prepared to de-implement or pause initiatives that no longer serve their purpose.



School level: Schools implement, systems support

- **Schools as the site of change:** Implementation is the process of deliberately embedding evidence-based practice into real-world settings (Albers & Pattuwage, 2017). In education, the work of change happens in classrooms and schools, not in central offices (Burns, 2023; Viennet & Pont, 2017). Systems must therefore prioritise supporting schools rather than assuming implementation will 'trickle down'. This requires an accurate understanding of what is happening in schools so that systems know what classroom practice looks like, how it is changing over time and what supports schools need to implement and sustain new practices effectively.

- **Teachers as the primary locus of change:** Understanding how and why teachers change practice is central to any serious effort to improve system coherence. The literature shows that teachers are not resistant to change – rather most are highly motivated professionals whose practice is shaped not only by formal knowledge, but deeply embedded tacit and practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985; Elbaz, 1981), developed through experience. Practice is therefore not something simply cognitively held but is enacted in a way that is closely tied to teachers’ professional identity and sense of competence. Teachers’ commitment to students’ learning and equity drives their openness to change. When change is aligned with this moral purpose, and communicated clearly as such, teachers will be more likely to invest in the effort to adapt their practice (Fullan, 2002).
- **Implementation as a process:** Schools need clarity about both *what* to implement and *how* to do it. When this direction is absent, teachers are left to interpret policies in inconsistent ways, creating confusion and reducing fidelity (Ejler et al., 2016; McIsaac et al., 2019; Weiss et al., 2016). Clear, coherent processes help ensure alignment across initiatives. Effective change requires sustained support over multiple years. Quick fixes or one-off programs rarely work. When schools use evidence-based processes, the effectiveness of initiatives increases significantly (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Dyssegaard et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2003; Yeung et al., 2016).



Individual level: Be reflexive and equity-focused

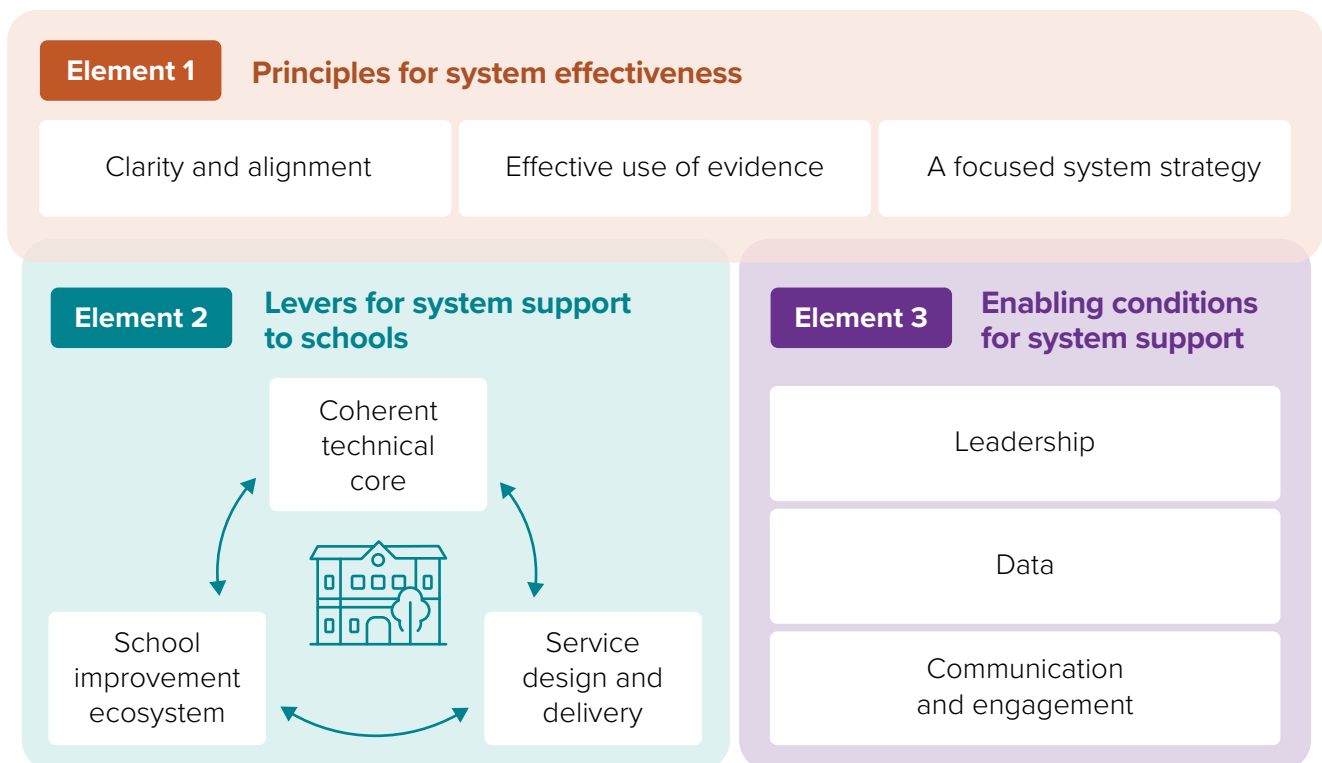
- **Reflexivity:** System leaders and educators alike need to critically examine their own attitudes, assumptions and biases, to ensure change is culturally responsive and equitable (Ryan, 2023). This is particularly important for priority equity cohorts, including students from diverse backgrounds, First Nations communities, students with disability and students from regional, rural and remote locations, where a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach risks reinforcing inequities (Carey, 2015; McLure & Aldridge, 2022; NSW Department of Education, 2023).
- **Responsiveness:** Effective change requires adapting initiatives to local conditions rather than imposing external models unchanged. Responsiveness is a non-linear, ongoing process, requiring flexibility and sensitivity to identity, culture and community (Biles & Biles, 2020; Morrison et al., 2019).
- **Inclusion of marginalised voices:** Reflexivity also involves recognising whose perspectives are excluded in policy and research. For example, the relative scarcity of First Nations-led research in education underscores the need for system leaders to actively create space for Indigenous perspectives in the design and evaluation of initiatives (Daramola et al., 2023; Shay et al., 2023).

How to read this guidance report

This guidance report is based on an adapted systematic review conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) on behalf of, and in collaboration with, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO). The purpose of the review was to examine what research identifies as the most effective strategies for systems to support schools in adopting evidence-based practices at scale. This guidance report provides an overview of key insights from the research.

Part 1 of this report outlines the 3 key elements for systems to support the adoption of evidence in schools (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Elements of system support for adopting evidence-based practices in schools



Part 2 of this report identifies key components of the process systems undertake when introducing new initiatives into schools (Figure 2). Undertaking these steps will help ensure that new initiatives are impactful and align with the policies, guidance and resources delivered as part of a system's core responsibilities outlined in Part 1.

Figure 2: Process for new system-led initiatives



Part 1

How systems can support the adoption of evidence-based practices in schools

The first part of this report outlines the 3 key elements ([Figure 1](#)) that enable systems to effectively support the adoption of evidence-based practices within schools. They are:

- [Element 1: Principles for system effectiveness](#)
- [Element 2: Levers for system support to schools](#)
- [Element 3: Enabling conditions for system support.](#)

When taken together, the research suggests that these elements support systems in delivering an effective model of support to schools, which provides them with the necessary resources to implement evidence-based practices in their unique contexts with consistency over time.



Element 1: Principles for system effectiveness

Element 1

Principles for system effectiveness

Clarity and alignment

Effective use of evidence

A focused system strategy

Education systems across Australia and internationally are striving to improve outcomes for students. Insights from the research highlight key principles present in systems that have achieved significant gains in student outcomes. While these principles may seem self-evident or assumed, the evidence shows that sustaining change at scale requires *deliberate attention* to system-level principles that support the use of evidence-based practices across schools. Three principles emerged as critical to system-wide improvement:

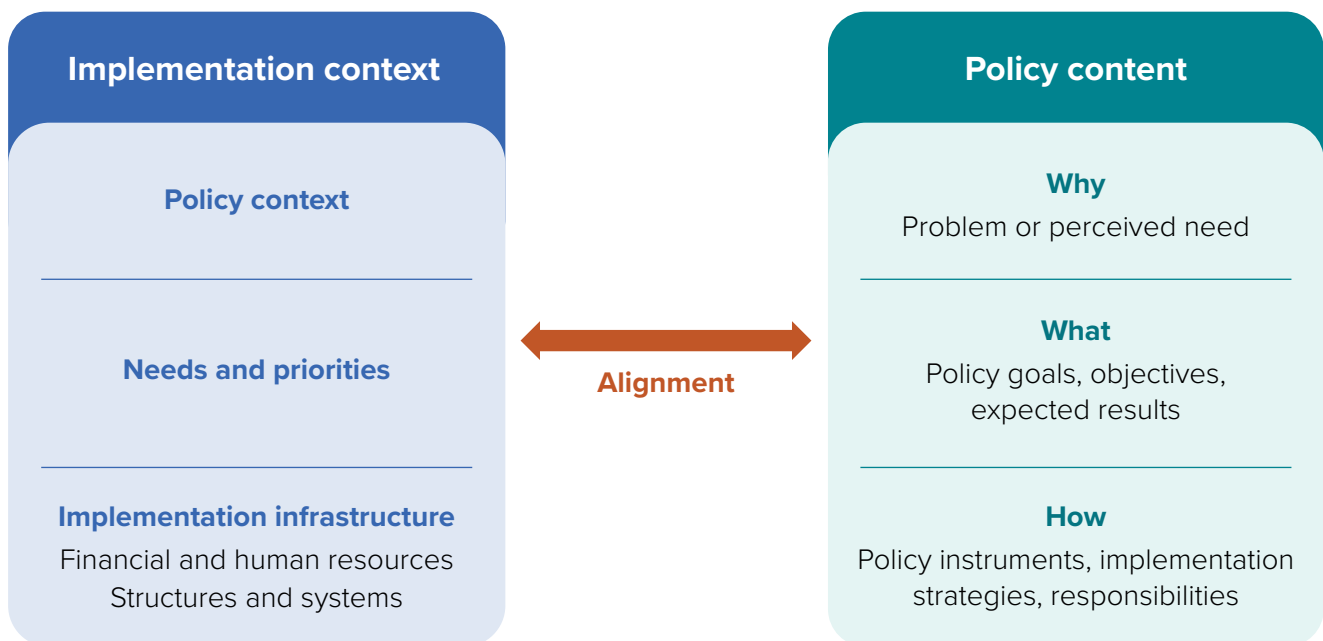
- [clarity and alignment](#)
- [effective use of evidence](#)
- [a focused system strategy](#).

Clarity and alignment

The research is overwhelmingly clear that the principles of clarity and alignment are crucial for systems to support schools effectively (Baan et al., 2023; Havers et al., 2020; Horodyska et al., 2015; Kennedy et al., 2019; Mclsaac et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2016).

Clarity for a system means that its work is well-defined, well-articulated, consistently communicated and understood by system staff, school leaders and teachers. The research highlights the importance of defining the ‘why’ (perceived need), the ‘what’ (evidence-based policy or practice) and the ‘how’ (policy instruments, implementation strategies and responsibilities for enactment) of any work a system intends to deliver (Baan et al., 2023). This supports all staff across the system in understanding what is being asked of them and implementing as intended.

An evidence synthesis examining effective implementation across a range of policy areas by the Wales Centre for Public Policy, identified alignment between policy content and implementation context as critical to policies achieving intended outcomes (Baan et al., 2023) ([Figure 3](#)).

Figure 3: Alignment between implementation context and policy content

Source: Diagram adapted from Figure 6 in Baan et al. (2023, p.42) with permission.

Applying this insight to education suggests that system-wide priorities, resources and policy need to align with the reality of implementation contexts – schools – and be supported by coherent and clear system supports, such as school improvement frameworks. This alignment between schools and the focus of system activity is a central feature of effective education systems.

The evidence suggests that a thorough understanding of the existing policy context, which includes all other policies and programs schools have chosen to, or are required to adopt, is a powerful enabler for system leaders (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Strong alignment of new initiatives with other central and local priorities supports school-level implementation and makes it possible to change complex systems at scale. This focus on coherence across all activities helps prevent schools from being burdened with the task of connecting the dots and allows them to focus on the work of implementing change (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2024).

Effective use of evidence

The research shows that an education system is most effective when it focuses on clearly defined goals supported by a relevant and rigorous evidence base (McLure & Aldridge, 2022). Education systems are large and complex organisations with many divisions and functions delivering services to schools. Educators have made clear that they want system leaders to not only support the effective use of evidence by others, but also to model quality research use within their own work (Rickinson et al., 2023). Building a culture of evidence use in the development of advice and support gives schools, teachers and the community confidence that guidance coming from the system is based on relevant, quality research showing the impact on student outcomes. This evidence base is strengthened by bringing together multiple forms of knowledge, including First Nations-led research, system-level data and community-generated insights on what works in specific contexts.

Evidence-based teaching practices are the most impactful in-school factor on student outcomes, and the evidence highlights that improvement is seen when systems have a clear strategic focus on these practices. This focus on evidence-based practices enables teachers and schools to prioritise practice, reducing ‘opportunity costs’ that arise when effort is directed elsewhere. When systems ask schools to implement multiple initiatives at once, this can lead to change fatigue and a perceived lack of agency among teachers (McLure & Aldridge, 2022), or to the de-prioritisation of implementation (Vanlommel & van den Boom-Muilenburg, 2024). A small number of clearly defined goals based on evidence increases the likelihood that teachers will focus on implementing the change required (Fletcher et al., 2004).

A focused system strategy

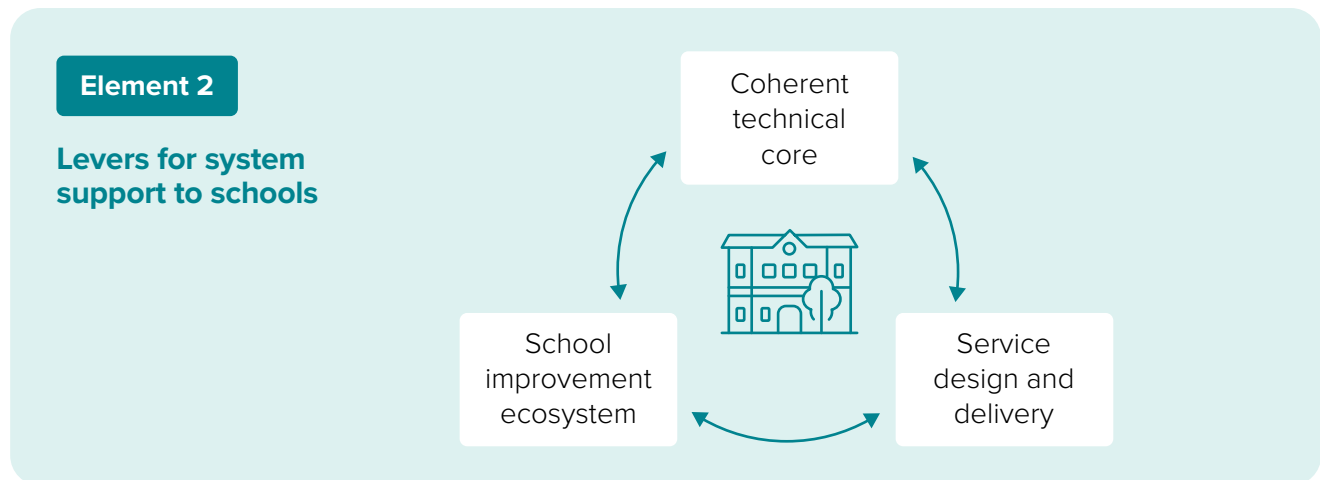
Effective education systems establish a clear, aligned strategy and vision that prioritises evidence-based practices and embeds them across system-wide initiatives, from whole-of-system through to regional and school levels (Hannay et al., 2006; Leach, 2021). Strategic plans are now commonplace in education systems, and while the evidence supports their use, it also points to the need for greater impact (McKinsey, 2024). Stronger strategies are characterised by specific and well-defined priorities, clarity about the work required to deliver them, and explicit alignment with both ongoing system work and school contexts.

Translating strategy into practice requires a detailed plan that is carefully sequenced, sustainable, and adaptable (McKinsey, 2024). Such plans need to accommodate emerging priorities while also buffering against distractions that may divert resources from the system’s focus on key evidence-based practices (Honig & Rainey, 2023). This includes assessing whether new initiatives align with the overall strategy and integrating them into existing work where appropriate (McLure & Aldridge, 2022).

Data plays a central role in reinforcing, tracking, and reporting on the effectiveness of system-wide strategies (Hamilton et al., 2013). Effective strategies are underpinned by goals, programs, and research evidence that are clearly defined and widely understood (Iatarola & Fruchter, 2004; McCulloch et al., 2022). A critical distinction is that the data selected must be both appropriate for what is being measured and deeply understood by system leaders.

System-wide strategies should also be responsive to the diverse needs and experiences of all student cohorts, including students with disability, First Nations students, and students with English as an additional language or dialect (McLure & Aldridge, 2022). Co-constructing priorities and initiatives with diverse communities helps ensure that systems can effectively meet the needs of all learners (Louis & Robinson, 2012).

Element 2: Levers for system support to schools



Education systems have a set of core, ongoing responsibilities that shape how schools are supported – from delivering targeted services and driving school improvement to ongoing professional development and developing high-quality centralised resources. These are not one-off reforms or temporary initiatives; they are the day-to-day work that defines how systems support schools to improve teaching and learning.

For the most effective and useful application of these supports for schools, these functions must be coherent with one another, aligned to system strategy, and responsive to school context. When done well, they form the backbone of a system’s support for schools – enabling consistent, evidence-based practice across diverse settings.

The research identifies 3 key levers for effective system support to schools:

- a coherent technical core to clearly outline system expectations to schools about what good practices look like
- a well-articulated, coherent and aligned school improvement ecosystem that provides school leaders with the necessary tools to achieve their school improvement goals
- a robust service design and delivery function that provides schools with adaptable resources they need when they need them to implement change in their context.

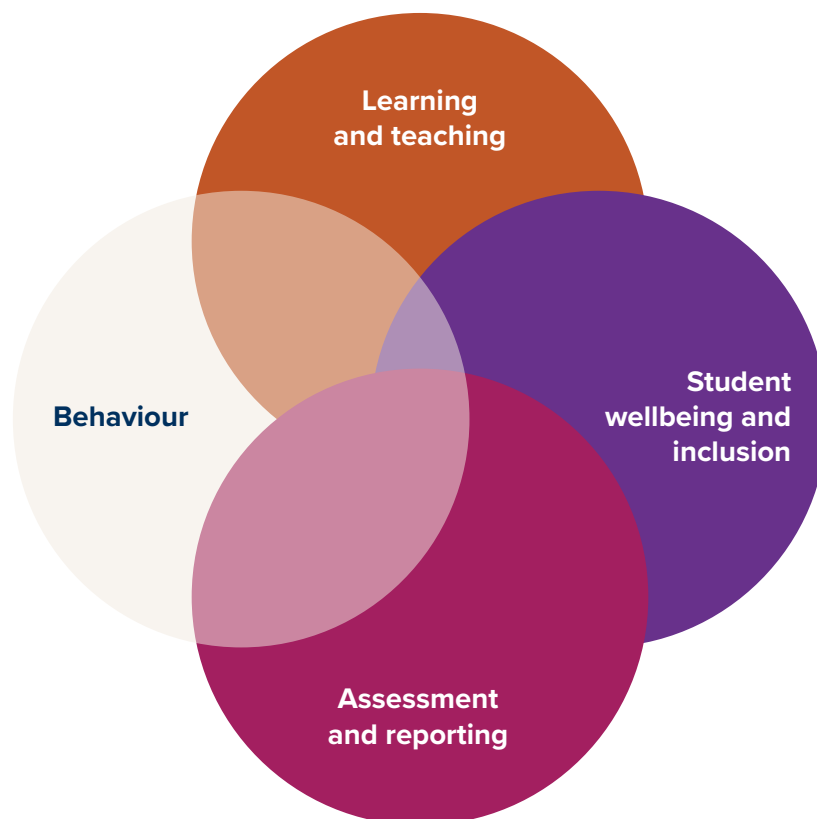
Through these levers, systems can provide robust, comprehensive and consistent advice and guidance to schools and teachers, increasing the likelihood of effective implementation of evidence-based practices within schools.

Coherent technical core

This first key lever of system support, a **coherent technical core**, establishes clear system expectations for what effective practice looks like in schools. Education systems have a range of formal policy statements, frameworks, strategies and programs that define key priorities and expectations for all schools, teachers and the broader community. In Australian systems, examples of these frameworks include school-wide positive behaviour systems frameworks, pedagogical frameworks, assessment and reporting frameworks, and disability and wellbeing frameworks. For this section, system framework refers to the specific policy positions and documents that outline system expectations for the core work of teachers and schools.

When system frameworks work together in an aligned and coherent manner, it creates opportunities for evidence-based teaching practices to be readily embedded into classrooms (Opfer et al., 2016). Prioritising schools' experience of these frameworks to ensure they are distinct, well-aligned and well-defined will prevent contradictory advice to schools. For example, if assessment frameworks do not align with advice on evidence-based learning and teaching practices, this reduces clarity in guidance for school leaders, making it difficult to implement. The articulation of these system frameworks and how they interact is the coherent technical core for an education system (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Coherent technical core



The system frameworks that make up the coherent technical core should clearly articulate and align with what the evidence tells us is the most effective way to improve student outcomes within schools. The evidence highlights the importance of system leaders only promoting practices and materials that align with the core and deliberately discouraging or de-implementing practices and materials that do not (Opfer et al., 2016). This also supports the system in maintaining stable policies that provide the time and space for schools to learn, refine, and integrate changes into practice (Porter, 1994, as cited in Stornaiuolo et al., 2023).

The coherent technical core sets out the system's non-negotiable positions on what evidence shows works in schools – for example, in classroom management, assessment, or high-impact teaching practices. These frameworks clearly articulate what teachers and leaders should prioritise, giving schools a stable point of reference for their work. Flexibility then lies in how schools and teachers adapt these expectations to the realities of their classrooms and communities (McKinsey, 2024). For First Nations education, this includes connecting system-wide approaches with locally governed and culturally grounded ways of knowing and doing. In this way, the coherent technical core promotes consistent, evidence-based practice while still enabling professional judgement and contextual responsiveness (Honig & Rainey, 2023).

When developing or reviewing frameworks within the coherent technical core, systems can consider:

- the strength of the evidence that underpins any framework
- how these frameworks impact differently on diverse communities, such as First Nations, and the ways these communities lead and contribute to policy design for their students and contexts
- the degree of integration and alignment of guidance to schools across all frameworks
- insights from consultation with schools about how frameworks to support practice will work in their context
- how the coherent technical core aligns with the [school improvement ecosystem](#) and system [service design and delivery](#) (discussed in the following sections).

Responsiveness and inclusive practice are important components of all elements of the coherent technical core. Reflexive practice and meaningful consultation with diverse communities can help system leaders embed multiple perspectives into frameworks, ensuring the non-negotiables are relevant for all learners. Similarly, integrating inclusive practice across learning and teaching, assessment, behaviour and wellbeing frameworks enables school leaders and teachers to address the needs of all students.

When developed in close collaboration with communities, the frameworks that make up the coherent technical core can act as powerful enablers of responsiveness and inclusivity, supporting improved outcomes for all students (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2020; Opfer et al., 2016; Stornaiuolo et al., 2023; Wallace & Arredondo, 2022).

School improvement ecosystem

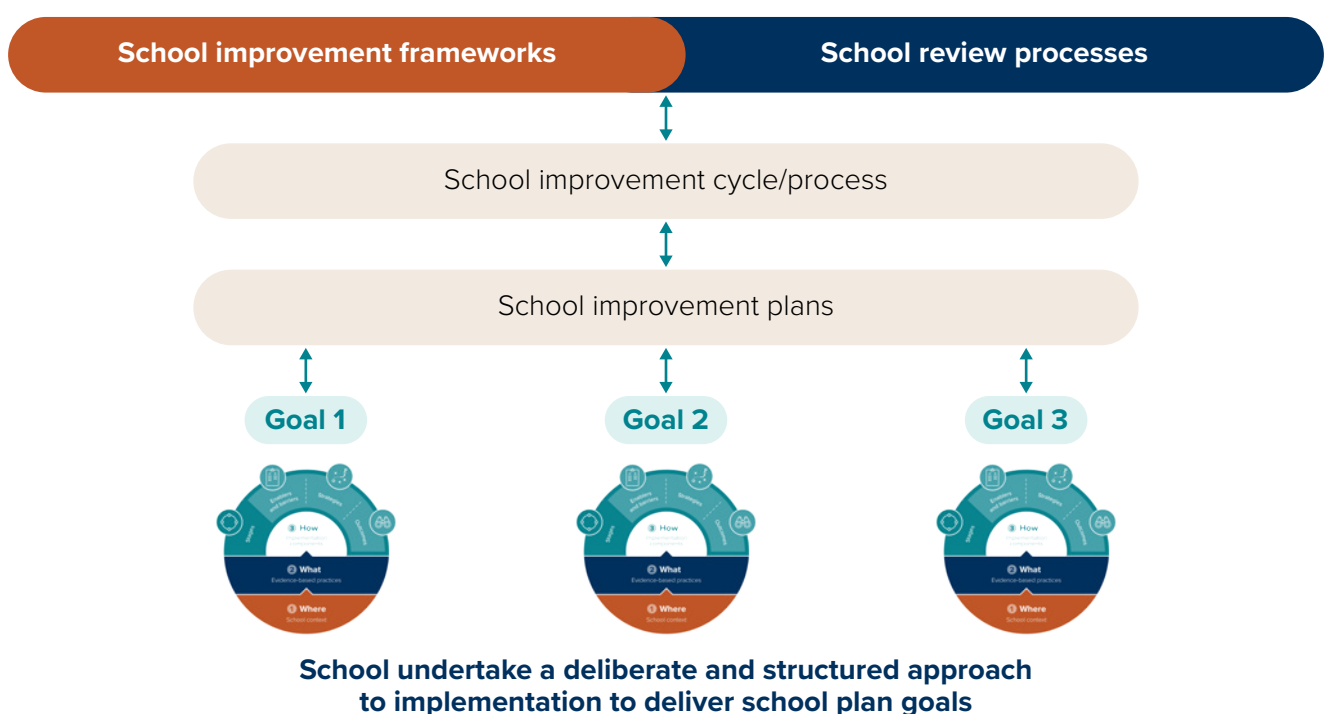
The second key lever for system support, a coherent **school improvement ecosystem**, provides school leaders with the aligned tools and processes they need to plan and implement improvement. School improvement agendas have become universal in education systems and their schools across the globe (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2018). A range of complex guidelines, frameworks, processes, planning cycles, performance evaluations and resources often accompany these agendas (Hartnell-Young et al., 2014) – the totality of which this guidance report will refer to as the ‘school improvement ecosystem’. Well-structured, implementation-minded and evidence-driven school improvement ecosystems are a key lever for systems to drive meaningful and authentic adoptions of evidence-based practices in schools (Wilkinson et al., 2019).

Australian education systems have had school improvement ecosystems in place for many years, for example, NSW’s School Excellence Framework, Victoria’s Framework for Improving Student Outcomes or the Northern Territory’s Signature Strategies, and have long-standing resources, processes, and regional support in place for schools. However, research can provide insight into ways to strengthen existing efforts to drive improvement in schools, including identifying some critical gaps that have been shown to support the uptake and use of evidence-based practices in schools.

Figure 5 identifies the key components of a well-structured school improvement ecosystem that delivers both the system’s requirement for a strong performance and accountability lever and acts as a genuine, practical and school-centred tool to support leaders in implementing and sustaining change. The research suggests that school improvement ecosystems should provide school leaders with clear guidance on:

- what schools should prioritise within school plans to achieve improved outcomes for students based on the evidence
- how schools can effectively implement the changes necessary to achieve these goals.

Figure 5: School improvement ecosystem



As discussed in [Element 1: Principles for system effectiveness](#), clarity and alignment are key to the success of this work. Alignment within the improvement ecosystem, between the ecosystem and other levers in the system, and across diverse school contexts in the system is critical for providing practical support to schools (Vanlommel & van den Boom-Muilenburg, 2024). This alignment creates a clear and straightforward process for school and regional leaders. It shifts the administrative burden from school leaders spending time and effort searching for solutions, documentation, and resources to support their improvement plans, to instead focusing on developing knowledge and capacity for implementing a deliberate and structured approach to achieving their strategic plan goals.

The following section draws on research to identify practical steps that systems can take to refine and strengthen their school improvement ecosystems.

School improvement frameworks and school reviews

The core of most school improvement ecosystems is the development of a school improvement framework that articulates ‘what good looks like’ in schools. These frameworks aim to outline effective school practices that foster self-reflection, goal setting, and, in some instances, serve as assessment criteria for school reviews. (Hartnell-Young et al., 2014).

As shown in [Figure 5](#), school improvement frameworks and the criteria for school reviews should reflect 2 sides of the same coin. Systems can give school leaders confidence by being explicit within both their school improvement framework and review criteria about what the evidence shows improves outcomes for students at a whole-school level (McLure & Aldridge, 2022). This ensures leaders are prioritising and planning with clarity, directing effort to strategies that matter most, and doing so against the same criteria they will later be reviewed on.

The purpose of review processes is not only to provide accountability but also to drive ongoing improvement. Well-designed reviews create incentives for better practice while generating information that directly informs school-level decision-making (Hamilton et al., 2013). Accountability is also one of the central reasons systems conduct reviews, with results feeding into governance and reporting requirements. Ensuring these processes generate useful insights for schools helps balance the governance function with the improvement function.

Reviews should be designed to incorporate perspectives from diverse communities on school performance and practice, ensuring accountability mechanisms remain relevant and inclusive. This is particularly important for the self-determination of First Nations communities and families who should have the opportunity to input their view on what effective schooling looks like for their children. Embedding First Nation’s perspectives within review processes improves their cultural legitimacy and supports community and cultural priorities.

The value of reviews ultimately lies in the information they generate. At the school level, data from improvement tools can guide planning, identify areas for support, and ensure responsiveness to context. At the system level, this information can be used to monitor the impact of initiatives and target support to schools with the greatest need (McLure & Aldridge, 2022). For example, measures included in reviews should capture not only performance but also the implementation and use of evidence-based practices, feeding into broader reporting and analysis functions to track outcomes across networks and the whole system (McLure & Aldridge, 2022).

Supporting the development of school improvement plans

The process of developing school improvement plans is a resource-heavy exercise for both schools and systems, however, they are an essential cornerstone of a school improvement ecosystem. School leaders should be supported to draft plans that are meaningful and actionable, moving beyond generic vision statements towards a limited number of targeted programs, policies and teaching strategies that demonstrably improve student outcomes (Cawelti, 2001, p. 32, as cited in Leithwood, 2010 p. 250). To achieve this, systems need to provide explicit scaffolding that helps school leaders to embed evidence-based goals relevant to their context into annual plans.

Research highlights several challenges that can undermine the authenticity of school improvement planning. Studies show that when planning is treated as a compliance exercise rather than an opportunity for improvement, school leaders may exhibit satisficing behaviours – that is, doing the bare minimum to satisfy requirements, such as repeating previous plans or completing sections superficially (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019). In the Australian context, some school leaders also perceive improvement planning as relevant only to low-performing schools, which reduces its uptake across the system (AERO, 2024).

Other studies point to common pitfalls that limit the effectiveness of school plans, including:

- **Lack of focus:** Plans without clear priorities or areas of emphasis fail to provide strategic direction (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2020).
- **Too many targets:** Excessive or diffuse goals reduce leaders' ability to recall and engage with their plans over time (Bendikson et al., 2020).
- **Superficial content:** Incomplete or recycled material undermines authenticity and signals that plans are not used as genuine improvement tools (Meyers & VanGronigen, 2019).

For systems, the guidance from this research is clear: meaningful planning requires processes that are achievable, research-informed, and designed to support collaboration with peers, mentors and regional staff. When systems provide well-structured processes, realistic expectations and genuine opportunities for dialogue, school improvement plans can become authentic tools for change rather than bureaucratic tasks. Evidence also shows that such planning is closely linked to high-performing systems (Masters, 2023), underscoring the importance of system-level design and support in enabling schools to plan for improvement effectively.

An evidence-based approach to implementation

A key element within the school improvement ecosystem is providing schools with an evidence-based approach to implementation that supports the sustained changes in practice needed to achieve the goals set out in their school plans. While most systems have frameworks, reviews and plans in place, research shows that the challenge often lies in implementation – helping schools to embed and maintain changes in teaching and leadership practice over time. Implementation science offers critical insights into what it takes to make change stick in schools.

Research highlights that implementation often falters due to an overreliance on a single strategy, insufficient attention to barriers, or the use of overly complex approaches that incorporate too many misaligned implementation strategies (Lewis et al., 2018). In education, tools frequently give inadequate consideration to school context, lack sufficient detail or usability, and fail to focus on sustaining efforts over time (Moore et al., 2024). School leaders also find implementation daunting, noting that ‘not only does the principal have to establish goals and an improvement plan, but must also determine the best method for initiating and implementing the reform’ (Clark, 2016, p. 25).

To address these challenges, systems can provide schools with a comprehensive and clear implementation approach, grounded in research, that enables schools to:

- take a staged approach, focusing on a manageable number of strategies at a time
- select and tailor implementation strategies to their context
- identify and act on what is helping and hindering implementation
- establish and monitor implementation outcomes.

Systems should support principals to understand, plan and deliver implementation cycles for each goal in their annual improvement plan. This requires not just setting priorities but equipping leaders with the structures, skills and tools to bring those priorities to life in classrooms and sustain them over time.

In Australia, AERO has been collaborating with schools over several years to test and refine the process of implementing evidence-based practices effectively. This effort has resulted in a [range of practical resources](#) – including modules, templates, guides, and worked examples – that systems can adapt or adopt to enhance their support for schools. This work is further supported by international guidance, such as the Education Endowment Foundation’s updated [implementation guide](#), which offers complementary insights for system leaders to consider.

This deliberate and structured approach to implementation is the critical link that allows school improvement frameworks, reviews and plans to translate into real, sustained change in teaching and leadership practice. By embedding implementation science into their ecosystems, systems can help ensure school improvement is not just planned but achieved and sustained.

The role of regional system leaders

An important consideration in strengthening school improvement ecosystems is the role of regional system leaders. These leaders, such as Regional Directors and Directors of Education, act as intermediaries between the central system and schools. While regional system leaders are not responsible for designing frameworks, reviews or plans, their interpretation, capability and buy-in of these system documents often determines whether schools receive consistent guidance and support.

Research highlights that regional leaders can play a powerful role in tailoring system initiatives to school contexts, while also maintaining alignment with system priorities (Hunter, 2021; Leithwood, 2010; Liang et al., 2021; Meyers, 2020; Robinson, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Positioned as both facilitators and monitors, they provide the critical touchpoint for school leaders in navigating improvement frameworks, developing school plans, and implementing evidence-based practices (McLure & Aldridge, 2022).

However, evidence shows that the effectiveness of these leaders is often hindered by a lack of clarity and consistent support. Leach (2024) finds that inconsistent interpretation of frameworks and initiatives, a lack of formal induction, and reliance on informal networks can create fragmented implementation across regions. Leach's work also highlights that coherence depends on 3 elements: clear structures (so roles are formally defined), shared strategies (so leaders understand common goals), and collective sense-making (so guidance is interpreted consistently across the system). Without these elements, regional leaders' ability to support schools is significantly weakened.

To maximise their contribution, systems need to:

- Clarify governance structures and clearly define the role of regional leaders (e.g., as facilitators, monitors, or both), so expectations are consistent across regions.
- Provide induction and ongoing capability-building, ensure new leaders are trained not just in administration, but in using frameworks, reviews and implementation approaches to support schools.
- Integrate responsibilities to align with initiatives (such as curriculum, wellbeing, or literacy initiatives) so regional leaders are not pulled in multiple directions and can present a unified message to schools.
- Develop collective practices and tools such as shared resources, templates and processes that support consistent translation of system guidance across regions.
- Embed accountability and impact measures to track how regional leaders influence school improvement (e.g., whether schools are using evidence-based practices consistently), not just compliance metrics.
- Plan for continuity, recognising high turnover in these roles, so that processes and expectations are entrenched beyond individual leaders, making sure schools experience consistency even when individual leaders change.

Strengthening the role of regional leaders in these ways is essential to ensuring all schools receive coherent, evidence-informed guidance and support. While frameworks, reviews and plans provide the architecture for improvement, it is these regional intermediaries who act as the lynchpins, ensuring that schools can translate system goals into meaningful action.

Service design and delivery

The third and final key lever for system support, **service design and delivery**, equips schools with the resources and supports they need to implement evidence-based practices in their local context. Systems provide a range of support services directly to schools. This includes designing and delivering the following services led by the system:

- **high-quality teaching resources** such as lesson plans, classroom-ready materials, scope and sequences, and curriculum sequencing and planning exemplars
- **knowledge-building activities and resources** such as webinars, one-off professional learning, staff development days, and online modules that focus on building content knowledge of evidence-based practices
- **knowledge-application activities and resources** such as professional learning communities, coaching, modelling, and access to specialists in areas like teaching practices, disability, behaviour, assessment or wellbeing that focus on supporting school leaders and teachers in applying evidence-based practices in context.

These services should not be seen as stand-alone supports. Rather, they are most effective when positioned within the broader context of the coherent technical core and school improvement ecosystem. For example, lesson plans that incorporate evidence-based practices can be taken up by schools as part of their implementation strategies. Recent Australian research has found that school leaders seek detailed guidance from systems on implementing evidence-based strategies, but they also value flexibility to adapt these to local settings (AERO, 2024).

Centralised resources on their own are rarely enough to shift practice. Research by AERO (2025) highlights that system-provided resources are most powerful when integrated into a deliberate and structured implementation approach. The role of systems, therefore, is not to implement on behalf of schools but to provide services and materials that schools can pick up as implementation strategies within their cycles of planning, action, and review.

High-quality teaching resources

High-quality teaching resources are classroom-ready tools designed for direct use by teachers. They are typically aligned to curriculum and evidence-based practices, provide clear guidance, include embedded assessments to monitor student progress, and are straightforward for teachers to implement (Hunter & Haywood, 2023). Research shows that such resources can reduce variation in what students are taught, support teacher planning, and prompt timely learning for staff (Ashbee, 2021). For example, one US district mapped curriculum to state standards and created pacing guides to help teachers align planning to district goals (Hitt & Meyers, 2022).

In the Australian context, school leaders report that the most useful resources are contextualised, practical, and rich with examples of what effective implementation looks like in schools and classrooms (AERO, 2024). Leaders value detailed resources but also want discretion to adapt them for local needs.

Research also highlights the importance of embedding responsive practice, including cultural responsiveness, into teaching resources. International studies suggest that involving diverse groups in resource development strengthens relevance and responsiveness (Barr, 2006; Opfer et al., 2016; Stornaiuolo et al., 2023; Wallace & Arredondo, 2022).

This includes creating resources that are responsive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, First Nations students, students with disability or students living in regional, rural and remote locations. In terms of cultural responsiveness in the Australian context, a commitment to closing the gap for our First Nations learners means system leaders should engage with First Nations communities when designing core materials (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2020). When this engagement extends to First Nations leadership in the design or validation of core materials, the resulting resources reflect not only cultural responsiveness but also cultural authority.

In practice, systems can:

- embed cultural responsiveness by reflexively engaging with First Nations communities in design processes
- review and endorse high-quality external materials for alignment with research, making them freely available to schools
- invest in digital infrastructure and user experience to ensure resources are easy for teachers to access and use (Abdo et al., 2021).

When thoughtfully designed and delivered, high-quality teaching resources can act as a strong enabler of consistent, evidence-based practice across diverse classrooms.

Knowledge-building activities and resources

Knowledge-building activities are designed to raise awareness and understanding of evidence-based practices across schools. They can take the form of webinars, one-off sessions, staff development days, or online modules (Calnan & McHugh, 2024; Clark et al., 2024; Tetroe et al., 2008).

Research in implementation science shows that one-off professional learning does not lead to sustained changes in teaching practice. The value of knowledge-building activities lies in building shared understanding of evidence-based practices, communicating consistent messages, and sparking system-wide interest. For example, research-practice briefs provided alongside new mathematics standards in one US state helped teachers plan lessons, facilitated collegial discussion, and clarified curriculum expectations (McCulloch et al., 2022). These activities should therefore be understood as supportive tools for building knowledge, not as stand-alone strategies to shift classroom practice. They are most effective when they sit within a broader set of implementation strategies that schools can adapt and apply in their context.

In practice, systems can:

- clearly define the purpose of each activity – for example, to inform curriculum decisions, strengthen content knowledge, or support collegial discussion
- ensure all staff, including rural and remote teachers, can access sessions without barriers
- provide resources in accessible formats (e.g., recordings, briefs, online modules) so they can be revisited on demand
- position these activities as part of a suite of implementation supports, not as sufficient on their own to drive change
- work at a pace that allows time for knowledge-building within and across schools.

Knowledge-application activities and resources

Knowledge-application activities focus on helping school leaders and teachers practise, embed, and refine evidence-based approaches in their own contexts. These include professional learning communities (PLCs), coaching, modelling, and access to instructional specialists.

Research shows that these activities are most effective when they employ mechanisms known to shift teacher practice, such as modelling, rehearsal, and feedback (Collin & Smith, 2021). Programs that include multiple mechanisms are associated with greater impact on student outcomes.

PLCs can provide collaborative forums for teachers to refine their practice and sustain improvement, with interprofessional collaboration consistently identified as a driver of evidence-informed change (Leithwood, 2010; McLure & Aldridge, 2022; Vanlommel & van den Boom-Muilenburg, 2024). Instructional coaching, meanwhile, offers personalised feedback and practical modelling, helping teachers connect research with classroom application and building confidence to adopt new practices (Daramola et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2021).

In practice, systems can:

- design activities that deliberately embed effective mechanisms such as modelling, rehearsal, and feedback
- establish PLCs and networks that enable collaboration and sharing of practice across schools
- invest in instructional coaching and modelling, and involve researchers to strengthen the connection between theory and practice.

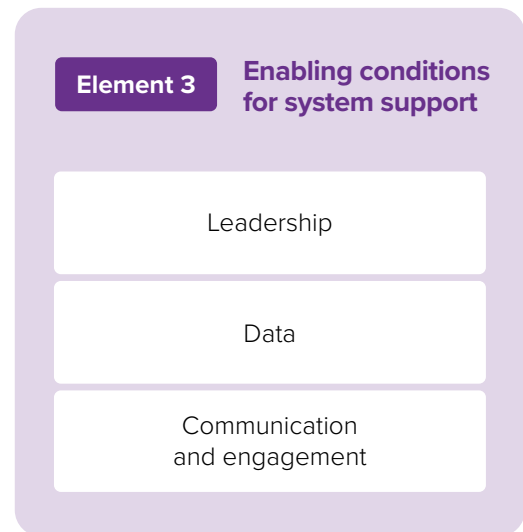
These approaches move beyond awareness-raising and create the conditions for sustained shifts in classroom practice.

Element 3: Enabling conditions for system support

The third element required for systems to support the adoption of evidence in schools is the presence of effective enabling conditions. While Elements [1](#) and [2](#) are essential, they are not sufficient on their own to ensure schools can implement evidence-based practices. Research highlights 3 conditions that are critical to establish across the system:

- [leadership](#)
- [data](#)
- [communication and engagement](#).

The following section outlines insights from the research on what systems should prioritise in each of these areas to enable evidence-based change in schools.



Leadership

Research shows that system leaders play a critical role in driving improvement. By shifting system oversight from a focus on compliance to one centred on genuine improvement, they can help build trust and support lasting change (Honig & Rainey, 2023). Research also highlights the importance of developing strong leadership with evidence-based practice as a priority at both the system and school levels. Leaders in both settings serve as role models for change (Vanlommel & van den Boom-Muilenburg, 2024), making it important for system leaders to model quality research use within their own work in addition to supporting school leaders in adopting evidence-based practices in schools (Rickinson et al., 2023). When principals recognise system leaders' capacity to strengthen their instructional leadership, it can foster greater trust between principals and system staff (Andersson & Liljenberg, 2020).

Developing and supporting leaders

Building on this, developing and supporting school leadership requires systems to create conditions that enable principals to build, practise and refine evidence-based practices in schools (McLure & Aldridge, 2022). Using research evidence and implementing evidence-based practices is sophisticated, professional work that requires time and effort (Rickinson et al., 2021). School leaders learn through various channels, including initial preparation programs, ongoing professional development, and hands-on experience (Leithwood, 2010). Research identifies several strategies that system leaders can use to foster ongoing leadership development, including:

- providing formal training, identified as a key enabler in system-wide change (McLure & Aldridge, 2022)
- establishing principal support groups and buddy systems (Fink & Resnick, 1999, as cited in Leithwood, 2010)
- facilitating principals' access to conferences (Fink & Resnick, 1999, as cited in Leithwood, 2010)
- planning activities to build principals' targeted skills, such as data literacy or curriculum implementation (Hussin & Al Abri, 2015, as cited in McLure & Aldridge, 2022)
- providing leadership coaching (McLure & Aldridge, 2022), including tailored coaching to address specific school-level priorities (Leithwood, 2010).

Strengthening the leadership pipeline

In addition to developing school leadership, strategic recruitment ensures that school and system leaders with the right skills are appointed to the right positions. Research highlights that systems should prioritise appointing individuals with demonstrated expertise in instructional leadership to both school and system leadership roles, rather than relying primarily on seniority (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Given current workforce shortages, it is also important to identify and support emerging leaders who demonstrate instructional leadership potential. By appointing leaders on this basis, systems can shape leadership teams that are capable of and committed to advancing evidence-based practices (Meyers, 2020).

Recruitment and development alone, however, are not enough. Sustaining improvement over time requires deliberate succession planning and distributed leadership. This involves cultivating multiple leaders who can drive change (McKinsey, 2024) and ensuring new leaders are supported in maintaining momentum following leadership turnover (McLure & Aldridge, 2022). In contexts of workforce shortage, succession planning also provides a structured way to grow the pipeline of instructional leaders and protect ongoing improvement efforts.

Data

Working with data and evidence requires a systemic approach. Research highlights 3 dimensions of this work that systems must get right: establishing robust data systems, ensuring strong data accessibility, and promoting appropriate data use.

Data systems

Robust data systems create the conditions for evidence to be accessed and applied across the system. Vanlommel and van den Boom-Muilenburg (2024) emphasise the need for organisational structures, including clear roles and policies, to enable access to evidence and provide guidance on its use. This also involves setting up digital channels and resources to support access to and use of high-quality evidence and data products (Abdo et al., 2021).

Data accessibility

Once systems are in place, the next priority is ensuring data accessibility so that information can inform decisions at both the system and school levels. Systems draw on multiple data sources, including academic performance, behavioural and implementation data, and external school reviews, to guide decision-making and drive system improvement. System-wide data-use policies can also strengthen the school improvement ecosystem, supporting schools' and systems' readiness for change (Blazar & Schueler, 2023). Accessibility is particularly important for schools themselves: publishing data in timely, clear and accessible formats (Hamilton et al., 2013) and providing teachers with time to analyse data in order to inform planning and address gaps in student understanding (Hitt & Meyers, 2022) all help school leaders and teachers to implement change effectively (McLure & Aldridge, 2022, p. 419).

Appropriate data use

The third priority is ensuring appropriate data use so that information supports improvement of all students, rather than reinforcing deficit-based narratives. Research highlights 2 complementary aspects of effective data use: adopting reflexive, strengths-based approaches and building capability in schools and the system to use data effectively.

A reflexive approach requires systems to ensure data is used to strengthen equity and highlight opportunities, not just deficits. For example, data use policies can explore areas of focus for specific cohorts, such as addressing the disproportionate suspension of First Nations students or students with disability (Jimerson & Childs, 2017). Reflexive data use may involve:

- bringing together a range of indicators to determine both strengths and needs of First Nations communities
- examining cross-agency data to highlight accountability and identify system-level strengths and gaps
- using disaggregated data to compare different First Nations communities and share effective strategies (Villegas, 2019).

At the same time, systems need to build data literacy and capability to enable principals, school leaders and teachers to interpret and act on data meaningfully. Developing an “inquiry habit of mind” among leaders, supported by data literacy has been shown to strengthen system-level implementation (McLure & Aldridge, 2022). Capability-building approaches identified in the research include:

- providing targeted professional development for principals and teachers on data analysis and use (Hussin & Al Abri, 2015, as cited in McLure & Aldridge, 2022; Wilkinson et al., 2019)
- analysing data collaboratively in structured cycles, such as 90-day reviews (Stornaiuolo et al., 2023)
- tailoring support to help leaders interpret signals from multiple measures – for example, combining test results with parent feedback – so data is contextualised and actionable (Hamilton et al., 2013; Hitt & Meyers, 2022)
- building principals’ data literacy in ways that are supported by clear system-level policies, which has been found to positively impact student achievement (Blazar & Schueler, 2023).

Data use is most effective when paired with thoughtful engagement with research evidence: data analysis can identify needs and assess readiness for change, while research evidence can help guide the selection of the evidence-based practices most likely to address them (Sharples et al., 2024). Data also plays a critical role in evaluating the effectiveness of evidence-based and culturally responsive practices. For instance, analysis has been critical to tracking progress for First Nations students and strengthening the evidence base for high-impact practices (Lamb et al., 2015). While changes to the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) proficiency standards have reduced comparability over time, they have also created a more nuanced picture of student achievement across Australia, helping build evidence for what works to support all students. A strengths-based, culturally responsive approach to data use aligns with Indigenous Data Sovereignty by recognising First Nations peoples’ authority over data and knowledges relating to them, and by requiring education systems to act in ways that are accountable to that authority (Maiaim nayri Wingara, 2018).

Communication and engagement

Effective communication and engagement are essential enablers for system-wide improvement. Clear communication ensures schools and stakeholders understand system priorities, while genuine engagement builds trust, creates feedback loops, and supports collaboration across levels of the system (Fullan, 2016). These practices are most effective when supported by an organisational culture that values thoughtful use of evidence, continuous learning and a shared responsibility for improved research at both the school and system levels (Rickinson et al., 2025). Without clear communication about the need, purpose, and mechanism of change, system initiatives risk failing because of mismatched expectations between system intent and school implementation (Timperley & Parr, 2005). Research highlights the importance of 3 domains:

- communication with schools
- collaboration across the system
- engagement beyond the education sector.

Schools

Communication with schools involves more than broadcasting information; it requires strategic knowledge-sharing. Knowledge brokering and translation activities, which focus on framing messages, so they are understood and acted upon, are critical (Baan et al., 2023). Leveraging influence at multiple levels allows school-facing system leaders to bridge differing understandings of evidence between policymakers and practitioners (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). Communication should also be timely, sharing knowledge with relevant stakeholders without overwhelming schools (Vanlommel & van den Boom-Muilenburg, 2024). Tailoring messages to specific contexts is equally important, with pilot programs shown to increase understanding of how initiatives work across different school types and student groups (Victorian Auditor General's Office, 2024).

Across the system

Across the system, communication and engagement practices help reduce teacher isolation and strengthen connections between schools. High-performing systems actively create opportunities for mutual learning, collaboration, and feedback flows (Ainscow, 2016; Ford & Ihrke, 2020; Leithwood, 2010). Networks of teachers and leaders can be used to share practice through structured learning walks (Louis & Robinson, 2012) or by exchanging exemplars of instruction (Leithwood, 2010). Monitoring schools' understanding of initiatives and providing further opportunities for dialogue when required also strengthens implementation (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). Systematic knowledge management ensures insights are captured and disseminated across the system (McLure & Aldridge, 2022).

Beyond the system

Sustained change requires systems to look outward, engaging both with other systems and agencies and with local communities. Collaboration across governance layers can help prevent institutional complexity from hindering implementation (Leach, 2024), while inter-agency partnerships strengthen knowledge translation across policy areas (Bullock et al., 2021; Tetroe et al., 2008). Independent research organisations also contribute by offering external expertise and timely advice (Clinton et al., 2018; Malin & Altowajri, 2020). Connections across the broader education and evidence ecosystem – such as engaging with professional learning providers, professional associations, teacher unions and universities – supports systems in engaging with research, mobilising knowledge, and learning from peers from other contexts (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023; OECD, 2022).

Equally important is early and ongoing engagement with families and communities. Building constructive relationships at this level creates shared ownership, with collective effort shown to sustain change (McKinsey, 2024). Schools are central here: by partnering with their local communities, they can foster the trust and shared commitment needed to embed practice change (Meyers, 2020). This process requires schools and systems to critically reflect on their own assumptions (Purcell et al., 2020) so that evidence-based practices can be adapted to the needs of diverse communities (McLure & Aldridge, 2022).

Taken together, these approaches show that effective communication and engagement – whether with schools, across the system, or beyond the education sector – are critical for aligning priorities, building trust, and ensuring key priorities and initiatives are both understood and sustained over time.



Part 2

A process for new or time-bound system-led initiatives

Part 1 of this report detailed the backbone that provides the stable, ongoing architecture of system support. However, education systems inevitably face new mandates, shifting priorities or crises that require them to introduce initiatives quickly. These may include:

- **new initiatives** – programs or practices not previously part of the system’s approach
- **time-bound initiatives** – short-term or transitional projects with a defined lifespan
- **decommissioning work** – where existing approaches must be wound back or replaced.

Some of these initiatives fill gaps in the backbone, while others may respond to political or social pressures, such as sudden requirements for new curriculum content. If not carefully managed, these initiatives can overwhelm schools, duplicate existing efforts or undermine confidence in system guidance.

To avoid this, systems need a **structured process** for defining, planning, enacting and evaluating initiatives (see Figure 6). The critical test at every stage is twofold:

1. **Who is this for?** Which cohorts of students, teachers or leaders are affected, and what do they *actually need*?
2. **Does this line up?** How does the initiative sit alongside everything else the system is already asking of schools?

For First Nations contexts, careful consideration, collaboration and integration of community-defined outcomes into program logics and evaluations at system and school level strengthen both trust and impact.

When these questions guide decision-making, new initiatives are more likely to strengthen the system backbone rather than fracture it.

Figure 6: Process for new system-led initiatives (reproduced from Figure 2)





Defining the initiative

The first step in managing a new or time-bound initiative is to clearly define what the initiative is trying to achieve, who it is for, and how it aligns with existing system work. Unlike ongoing business-as-usual responsibilities, these initiatives are typically responses to new policy mandates, emerging priorities, or gaps in the system's current support. Without careful definition, systems risk developing inconsistent or duplicative programs that confuse schools and dilute effort.

Defining an initiative requires:

- **Understanding the need:** Systems should identify the underlying need with rigour, analysing relevant data, performance trends, school demographics and existing initiatives. Research evidence should then inform the design of an intervention that directly responds to the identified need. This step ensures that interventions address root causes rather than surface symptoms.
- **Mapping affected cohorts:** The research suggests systems should conduct cohort analysis to understand all groups who will be impacted, and test alignment with existing targeted initiatives. For example, Truscott et al. (2004, as cited in McLure & Aldridge, 2022) critique reforms that overlooked students with disability, leading to strategies that were misaligned to their needs.
- **Engaging stakeholders:** Defining priorities should be co-constructed with educators, school leaders, and communities, recognising the perspectives of diverse cohorts. Reflexive engagement helps mitigate consultation fatigue and brings less dominant voices into decision-making (Louis & Robinson, 2012; Lowe et al., 2019).
- **Drafting a program logic:** At this stage, leaders can sketch an initial theory of change that links activities to intended short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. This draft program logic helps clarify the scope of the initiative and acts as a foundation for later refinement (Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, 2023).

By beginning with a clear, evidence-based definition of the initiative and its intended impact, systems increase the likelihood that new work will be both purposeful and coherent with the wider system strategy.



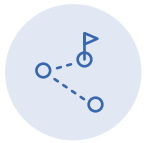
Planning

Once an initiative is defined, the second stage involves careful planning to ensure it is both practical for schools to implement and consistent with the system backbone. Planning translates intent into clear expectations, resources, and structures for delivery.

Planning requires:

- **Clarifying core elements:** Systems should identify the essential features of the initiative that must be implemented at the school level for it to be effective. These elements should be described in practical terms for teachers and leaders, including what high-fidelity delivery looks like in practice.
- **Setting success criteria:** Leaders should define what success looks like, both for the practice of core elements by individual teachers and for school-wide adoption. Success measures should be realistic and, where possible, linked to student outcomes.
- **Mapping to the backbone:** Finally, systems should explicitly test the initiative against existing curriculum guidance, assessment protocols, and teacher resources. This ensures alignment and prevents contradictory messages to schools. Where conflicts or duplications are identified, leaders may need to adjust, de-implement, or cease existing programs to maintain coherence.
- **Refining and finalising the program logic:** The draft logic developed during definition should now be strengthened into a complete model. This should include planning for the specific supports that will be provided to schools to implement the initiative. A robust program logic acts as the initiative's blueprint, linking activities with expected outputs and outcomes, and laying the groundwork for monitoring and evaluation (Lawton et al., 2014).
- **Embedding evaluation design:** Evaluation should be planned alongside the initiative from the outset, with measures and data collection strategies linked to the program logic. This should include establishing a clear baseline that the initiative will be assessed against as it is enacted. This ensures clarity about what success looks like and lays the foundation for meaningful monitoring and improvement later.

Through deliberate planning, systems can ensure new initiatives are clearly articulated, consistent with broader strategy, and operationally feasible for schools.



Enactment

The third stage is enactment - supporting schools to implement the initiative in practice. This stage is about moving from plans to delivery, while ensuring schools are not left to interpret system priorities without adequate guidance or support.

Enacting an initiative involves:

- **Providing clear communication:** Schools need a transparent explanation of the initiative's purpose, the supporting evidence base, intended outcomes, and available supports. Communication should be timely, consistent, and framed in terms of how the initiative fits within existing system priorities.
- **Delivering practical supports:** Systems should provide contextualised resources that address barriers to implementation, such as limited expertise, time, or infrastructure. Support may include access to specialists, coaching, or additional resourcing for schools in complex contexts (Baan et al., 2023).
- **Establishing responsive wraparound assistance:** Mechanisms for ongoing dialogue with schools should be built into enactment. These allow schools to raise challenges, request targeted support, and share early learnings to inform system-wide adjustments.

At this stage, the system's role is to make implementation feasible, ensuring schools have both the clarity and support needed to take up new practices with confidence.



Monitoring and evaluation

Throughout the process, systems should be monitoring and evaluating the initiative. Without it, systems risk investing significant resources into initiatives without knowing whether they are working or how to improve them.

Monitoring and evaluation require:

- **Embedding evaluation from the outset:** Data collection and accountability mechanisms should be designed alongside the initiative, not added afterwards (Robinson et al., 2017, as cited in McLure & Aldridge, 2022).
- **Clarifying objectives and reporting lines:** Schools should be provided with clear outcome measures and reporting expectations, with channels for data to flow back to the system to inform targeted support.
- **Balancing formal and informal monitoring:** Data sources might include surveys, learning assessments, and progress reports, as well as more agile mechanisms such as school feedback loops that allow for rapid iteration (Andersson & Liljenberg, 2020; Leithwood, 2010).
- **Respecting First Nations Data Sovereignty:** Systems should ensure First Nations communities have control over the collection, access, and use of their data, and lead or co-design evaluation of relevant initiatives (NSW Department of Education, 2023; Shay et al., 2023). For existing initiatives and associated data, system leaders can empower First Nations communities to evaluate programs or 'examine existing data in ways that illuminate more about their citizens and the systems that are supposed to serve them' (Villegas, 2019, p. 967). This approach recognises the authority of First Nations communities to interpret evaluation findings and determine the implications for future system action.
- **Commissioning formal evaluations where warranted:** For large-scale initiatives, structured evaluation against the program logic may be necessary. Such evaluations add to the system's evidence base and strengthen future decision-making (NSW Treasury, 2023).

By embedding robust monitoring and evaluation, systems can adapt initiatives in real time, demonstrate their impact, and build an evidence base for what works in supporting schools.

Conclusion

Achieving enduring and meaningful change within education systems is difficult, as change ultimately occurs through the day-to-day decisions and practices of classroom teachers. However, research highlights that systems focused on the evidence for improving practice and effective implementation can create the conditions for change within schools. The work of schools is complex and context-dependent, so system leaders must create an environment where school leaders and teachers have the necessary guidance and support to meaningfully adopt evidence-based practices. Change within education systems can also be relational, historical and political. Systems that deliver an aligned and consistent model of support to schools, with the necessary resources and a deep understanding of implementation as a context-dependent process, enable schools to successfully implement evidence-based practices in their unique contexts.

References

- Abdo, M., Goh, E., Hateley-Browne, J., Wong, J., Bajaj, A., & Mildon, R. (2021). *What works for “what works” centres: Learnings from system-level efforts to cultivate evidence informed practice*. Centre for Evidence and Implementation. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/research-reports/what-works-what-works-centres>
- Ainscow, M. (2016). Collaboration as a strategy for promoting equity in education: Possibilities and barriers. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(2), 159–172. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-12-2015-0013>
- Albers, B., & Pattuwege, L. (2017). *Implementation in education: Findings from a scoping review*. Evidence for Learning. <https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/implementation-in-education>
- Andersson, K., & Liljenberg, M. (2020). ‘Tell us what, but not how’ – understanding intra-organisational trust among principals and LEA officials in a decentralised school system. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(5), 465–482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1832980>
- Ashbee, R. (2021). *Curriculum: Theory, culture and the subject specialisms*. Routledge.
- Australian Education Research Organisation. (2024). *How can systems support middle-performing schools to improve?* [Unpublished report].
- Australian Education Research Organisation. (2025). *Evidence-informed implementation in schools: Why and how AERO developed a deliberate and structured approach for implementing evidence-based teaching practices*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/discussion-papers/evidence-informed-implementation-schools>
- Australian National Audit Office. (2014). *Successful implementation of policy initiatives: Better practice guide*. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-494733031/view>
- Baan, A.-M., Lewis, J., Wills, E., Lloyd, A., & Bristow, D. (2023). *Implementation-minded policy making*. Wales Centre for Public Policy. <https://wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Implementation-Minded-Policy-Making-1.pdf>
- Barr, M. D. (2006). Racialised education in Singapore. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 5(1), 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-005-5692-8>
- Bendikson, L., Broadwith, M., Zhu, T., & Meyer, F. (2020). Goal pursuit practices in high schools: Hitting the target? *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(6), 713–728. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-01-2020-0020>
- Biles, J., & Biles, B. (2020). Indigenous Australian cultural competence. In B. Biles & J. Biles (Eds.), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ health and wellbeing* (pp. 3–26). Oxford University Press.
- Blazar, D., & Schueler, B. (2023). Effective school district policies and practices: Synthesizing theoretical frameworks and empirical findings across disciplines. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 1–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2023.2269923>

- Bullock, H. L., Lavis, J. N., Wilson, M. G., Mulvale, G., & Miatello, A. (2021). Understanding the implementation of evidence-informed policies and practices from a policy perspective: A critical interpretive synthesis. *Implementation Science*, *16*(1), Article 18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-021-01082-7>
- Burns, T. (2023). *The evolution of evidence-informed policy and practice: An international perspective*. Centre for Strategic Education. <https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/about-us/position-papers-and-articles/the-evolution-of-evidence-informed-policy-and-practice>
- Calnan, S., & McHugh, S. (2024). Experiences and perceptions of evidence use among senior health service decision makers in Ireland: A qualitative study. *Evidence & Policy*, *20*(2), 163–183. <https://doi.org/10.1332/174426421X16917571241005>
- Carey, M. (2015). The limits of cultural competence: An Indigenous Studies perspective. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *34*(5), 828–840. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1011097>
- Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence. (2023). *Developing and using program logic: A guide*. Population and Public Health Division, NSW Ministry of Health. <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/research/Pages/developing-program-logic.aspx>
- Clandinin, D. J. (1985). Personal practical knowledge: A study of teachers' classroom images. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *15*(4), 361–385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.1985.11075976>
- Clark, A. J. (2016). *Sustainable school improvement: Suburban elementary principals' capacity building* (Publication No. 1791140050) [Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University Chicago]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Clark, E. C., Burnett, T., Blair, R., Traynor, R. L., Hagerman, L., & Dobbins, M. (2024). Strategies to implement evidence-informed decision making at the organizational level: A rapid systematic review. *BMC Health Services Research*, *24*(1), Article 405. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-024-10841-3>
- Clinton, J. M., Aston, R., & Quach, J. (2018). *Promoting evidence uptake in schools: A review of the key features of research and evidence institutions*. University of Melbourne Centre for Program Evaluation. <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/promoting-evidence-uptake-schools-review-key-features-research-and-evidence-institutions>
- Coburn, C. E., & Talbert, J. E. (2006). Conceptions of evidence use in school districts: Mapping the terrain. *American Journal of Education*, *112*(4), 469–495. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/505056>
- Collin, J., & Smith, E. (2021). *Effective professional development: Guidance report*. Education Endowment Foundation. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/effective-professional-development>
- Daramola, E. J., Allbright, T. N., & Marsh, J. A. (2023). “Are you saying that we’re racist?”: Comparing normative, political, and technical dimensions of instructional and disciplinary policies. *Teachers College Record*, *125*(4), 3–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681231176921>
- Durlak, J. A., & DuPre, E. P. (2008). Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *41*(3–4), 327. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-008-9165-0>

- Dyssegaard, C. B., Egelund, N., & Sommersel, H. B. (2017). *What enables or hinders the use of research-based knowledge in primary and lower secondary school: A systematic review and state of the field analysis*. Danish Clearinghouse for Educational Research. <https://www.videnomlaesning.dk/media/2176/what-enables-or-hinders-the-use-of-research-based-knowledge-in-primary-and-lower-secondary-school-a-systematic-review-and-state-of-the-field-analysis.pdf>
- Ejler, N., Ostersen, J., Graff, D., & Dyrby, T. (2016). *New approaches to policy implementation: How public executives address the complexity of policy implementation and what can be done to increase efficiency and sustainability*. Ramboll. <https://c.ramboll.com/en-gb/implementation-whitepaper-eng>
- Elbaz, F. (1981). The teacher's "practical knowledge": Report of a case study. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 11(1), 43–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.1981.11075237>
- First Nations Education Steering Committee. (2020). *Maths First Peoples: Teacher resource guide. Elementary & secondary*. First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association. <https://www.fnesc.ca/math-first-peoples/>
- Fletcher, M., Wyatt-Smith, C., Bartlett, B., & Kearney, J. (2004). Weaving accounts of literacy through the official curriculum: Stitching policy to practice. In B. Bartlett, F. Bryer, & D. Roebuck (Eds.), *Educating: Weaving research into practice* (Vol. 2, pp. 81–93). Griffith University.
- Ford, M. R., & Ihrke, D. M. (2020). School board member strategic planning prioritization and school district performance. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, 19(4), 597–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2019.1638420>
- Fullan, M. (2002). The Change Leader. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 16–20. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-change-leader>
- Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed). Teachers College Press.
- Hamilton, L. S., Schwartz, H. L., Stecher, B. M., & Steele, J. L. (2013). Improving accountability through expanded measures of performance. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 51(4), 453–475. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231311325659>
- Hannay, L. M., Manning, M., Earl, S., & Blair, D. (2006). Leaders leading and learning (Part 1). *Management in Education*, 20(2), 20–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089202060602000206>
- Hartnell-Young, E. A., Marshall, R., & Hassell, R. (2014, January 2). Implementing a generic school improvement framework: Experience of the National School Improvement Tool in Australian settings. *The Past, Present and Future of Sustainable School Effectiveness*. The 27th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. https://research.acer.edu.au/tli_misc/46
- Havers, S. M., Kate Martin, E., Wilson, A., & Hall, L. (2020). A systematic review and meta-synthesis of policy intervention characteristics that influence the implementation of government-directed policy in the hospital setting: Implications for infection prevention and control. *Journal of Infection Prevention*, 21(3), 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757177420907696>
- Hitt, D. H., & Meyers, C. V. (2022). Examining three school systems' actions linked to improving their lowest-performing schools. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 21(2) 959–983. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2021.1894454>

Honig, M. I., & Rainey, L. (2023). *From tinkering to transformation: How school district central offices drive equitable teaching and learning*. Harvard Education Press.

Horodyska, K., Luszczynska, A., van den Berg, M., Hendriksen, M., Roos, G., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., & Brug, J. (2015). Good practice characteristics of diet and physical activity interventions and policies: An umbrella review. *BMC Public Health*, 15(1), 19. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-1354-9>

Hunter, J. (2021). *Alternative approaches to governing street-level work in the classroom: Australian tales of entanglement and distance* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Melbourne]. <https://hdl.handle.net/11343/279360>

Hunter, J., & Haywood, A. (2023). *How to implement a whole-school curriculum approach*. Grattan Institute. <https://grattan.edu.au/report/how-to-implement-a-whole-school-curriculum-approach/>

Iatarola, P., & Fruchter, N. (2004). District effectiveness: A study of investment strategies in New York City public schools and districts. *Educational Policy*, 18(3), 491–512. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904804265020>

Jackson, J., Matthews, H., Ryan, J., Macklin, S., & Brown, C. (2022). *Reinvigorating and reimagining our schools: A vision for post-pandemic schooling in Australia*. Mitchell Institute, Victoria University. <https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/schooling/reinvigorating-reimagining-our-schools-a-vision-for-post-pandemic-schooling-in-australia>

Jimerson, J. B., & Childs, J. (2017). Signal and symbol: How state and local policies address data-informed practice. *Educational Policy*, 31(5), 584–614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904815613444>

Kennedy, C., O'Reilly, P., O'Connell, R., O'Leary, D., Fealy, G., Hegarty, J.-M., Brady, A.-M., Nicholson, E., McNamara, M., & Casey, M. (2019). Integrative review: Identifying the evidence base for policymaking and analysis in health care. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 75(12). <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14121>

Koh, G. A., & Askill-Williams, H. (2021). Sustainable school-improvement in complex adaptive systems: A scoping review. *Review of Education*, 9(1), 281–314. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3246>

Lamb, S., Jackson, J., Walstab, A., & Huo, S. (2015). *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*. Mitchell Institute, Victoria University. <https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/educational-opportunity/educational-opportunity-in-australia-2015-who-succeeds-who-misses-out>

Lawton, B., Brandon, P. R., Cicchinelli, L., & Kekahio, W. (2014). *Logic models: A tool for designing and monitoring program evaluations*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. <https://impact.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2021-08/Logic%20Model%20resource%20IES.pdf>

Leach, T. (2021). *System reform: An exploration of policy interpretation and translation through the enacted role of Regional Education Officers* [Doctor of Philosophy, University of Southern Queensland]. <https://research.usq.edu.au/item/q75yz/system-reform-an-exploration-of-policy-interpretation-and-translation-through-the-enacted-role-of-regional-education-officers>

Leach, T. (2024). System reform: The ever-elusive quest—An Australian study of how system middle leaders' role enactment influences the attainment of policy coherence. *Education Sciences*, 14(6), Article 596. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14060596>

- Leithwood, K. (2010). Characteristics of school districts that are exceptionally effective in closing the achievement gap. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9(3), 245–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700761003731500>
- Lewis, C. C., Klasnja, P., Powell, B. J., Lyon, A. R., Tuzzio, L., Jones, S., Walsh-Bailey, C., & Weiner, B. (2018). From Classification to Causality: Advancing Understanding of Mechanisms of Change in Implementation Science. *Frontiers in Public Health*, Volume 6-2018. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2018.00136>
- Liang, J., Mitchell, T., & Scott, J. (2021). Statewide school redesign: Integrating design thinking and the four disciplines of execution as a continuous school improvement process. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 24(1), 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555458920975462>
- Louis, K. S., & Robinson, V. M. (2012). External mandates and instructional leadership: School leaders as mediating agents. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 50(5), 629–665. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231211249853>
- Lowe, K., Harrison, N., Tennent, C., Guenther, J., Vass, G., & Moodie, N. (2019). Factors affecting the development of school and Indigenous community engagement: A systematic review. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 46(2), 253–271. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00314-6>
- Maiam nayri Wingara. (2018). *Indigenous Data Sovereignty Communique*. 2. <https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/research>
- Malin, J., & Altowajri, M. (2020). Strategic planning and research-practice partnerships as a dynamic, generative duo? *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, 32(1), Article 5, 71–79. <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/mwer/vol32/iss1/5>
- Mason, M. (2014, February). Complexity theory in education governance: Initiating and sustaining systemic change. In *Governing Complex Education Systems (GCES): Understanding complexity: The future of education governance* (Paper presentation). Ministry of Education and Research, Oslo, Norway. https://web-archiv.e.oecd.org/2014-02-24/267662-02_complexity%20theory%20in%20education%20governance%20-%20oecd-norway%20-%20mason.pdf
- Masters, G. N. (2023). *Building a world-class learning system: Insights from some top-performing school systems*. National Center on Education and the Economy. https://research.acer.edu.au/tll_misc/43/
- McCulloch, A. W., Mawhinney, K. J., Holl-Cross, C., Wilson, P. H., & Wonsavage, F. P. (2022). *Professional learning at scale: Designing a boundary object*. North American Chapter of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED630428>
- Mclsaac, J.-L. D., Spencer, R., Chiasson, K., Kontak, J., & Kirk, S. F. L. (2019). Factors influencing the implementation of nutrition policies in schools: A scoping review. *Health Education & Behavior: The Official Publication of the Society for Public Health Education*, 46(2), 224–250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198118796891>
- McKinsey. (2024). *Spark & sustain: How all of the world's school systems can improve learning at scale*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/spark-and-sustain-how-school-systems-can-improve-learning-at-scale>

- McLure, F. I., & Aldridge, J. M. (2022). A systematic literature review of barriers and supports: Initiating educational change at the system level. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(4), 402–431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2113050>
- Meyers, C. V. (2020). District-led school turnaround: A case study of one U.S. district's turnaround launch for multiple schools. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 19(4), 710–729. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2019.1637902>
- Meyers, C. V., & VanGronigen, B. A. (2019). A lack of authentic school improvement plan development: Evidence of principal satisficing behavior. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 57(3), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-09-2018-0154>
- Mockler, N., & Groundwater-Smith, S. (2018). The language of reform in education policy. In *Questioning the Language of Improvement and Reform in Education: Reclaiming Meaning* (pp. 15–36). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/mono/10.4324/9781315519579-2/language-reform-education-policy-nicole-mockler-susan-groundwater-smith?context=ubx&refId=d5283304-66f9-4005-ab47-36b5cac2feda>
- Moore, D., Proctor, R., Benham-Clarke, S., Gains, H., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Axford, N., Rogers, M., Anderson, R., Hall, D., Berry, V., Forbes, C., & Lloyd, J. (2024). *Review of evidence on implementation in education*. Education Endowment Foundation. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/implementation-in-education>
- Morrison, A., Rigney, L.-I., Hattam, R., & Diplock, A. (2019). *Toward an Australian culturally responsive pedagogy: A narrative review of the literature*. University of South Australia. <https://apo.org.au/node/262951>
- National Center on Education and the Economy. (2024). *Blueprint: Designing systems that work*. <https://ncee.org/blueprint/>
- Nguyen, B., Cranney, L., Bellew, B., & Thomas, M. (2021). Implementing food environment policies at scale: What helps? What hinders? A systematic review of barriers and enablers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(19), Article 10346. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph181910346>
- NSW Department of Education. (2023). *Re-imagining evaluation: A culturally responsive evaluation framework for the NSW Department of Education*. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/publications/re-imagining-evaluation-framework>
- NSW Treasury. (2023). *Evaluation guidelines*. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/nsw-treasury/documents-library/tpg22-22>
- Opfer, V. D., Kaufman, J. H., & Thompson, L. E. (2016). *Implementation of K–12 state standards for mathematics and English language arts and literacy: Findings from the American Teacher Panel*. Rand. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1529-1.html
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2022). *Who really cares about using education research in policy and practice?: Strengthening research engagement*. Educational Research and Innovation. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/d7ff793d-en>

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023). *Who really cares about using education research in policy and practice?: Developing a culture of research engagement*. Educational Research and Innovation. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc641427-en>
- Purcell, M., Davis, J., Coopes, R., & Jackson, C. (2020). *Stronger Smarter: A strength-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education*. Smarter Stronger Institute. https://strongersmarter.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/PUB_strength-based-approaches_final_2020.pdf
- Rickinson, M., Gleeson, J., Walsh, L., Salisbury, M., Culter, B., & Cirkony, C. (2021). *Using research well in Australian schools*. Monash University. <https://doi.org/10.26180/14783637.v2>
- Rickinson, M., Walsh, L., Gleeson, J., Culter, B., & Hall, G. (2023). *Using research well as a system: Q discussion paper*. Monash University. <https://doi.org/10.26180/23671923.v2>
- Rickinson, M., Walsh, L., Gleeson, J., Culter, B., Plant, B., Boulet, M., Hall, G., Cirkony, C., & Salisbury, M. (2025). *How to use research evidence well in education: A guide for educators and leaders*. Routledge.
- Robinson, S. (2011). Diluting education? An ethnographic study of change in an Australian Ministry of Education. *Discourse*, 32(5), 797–807. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.620760>
- Ryan, M. (2023). Reflexive epistemic communities of practice: Enabling the profession through sustainable partnerships. In M. Winslade, T. Loughland, & M. J. Eady (Eds.), *Work-integrated learning case studies in teacher education* (pp. 3–10). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-6532-6_1
- Schleicher, A. (2024). Foreword. In McKinsey, *Spark & sustain: How all of the world's school systems can improve learning at scale*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/spark-and-sustain-how-school-systems-can-improve-learning-at-scale>
- Sharples, J., Eaton, J., & Boughelaf, J. (2024). *A school's guide to implementation*. Education Endowment Foundation. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/implementation>
- Shay, M., Sarra, G., & Lampert, J. (2023). Indigenous education policy, practice and research: Unravelling the tangled web. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 50(1), 73–88. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00581-w>
- Snyder, R. R. (2017). Resistance to change among veteran teachers: Providing voice for more effective engagement. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 12(1). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1145464>
- Stornaiuolo, A., Desimone, L., & Polikoff, M. (2023). “The good struggle” of flexible specificity: Districts balancing specific guidance with autonomy to support standards-based instruction. *American Educational Research Journal*, 60(3), 521–561. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231161037>
- Tetroe, J. M., Graham, I. D., Foy, R., Robinson, N., Eccles, M. P., Wensing, M., Durieux, P., Légaré, F., Nielson, C. P., Adily, A., Ward, J. E., Porter, C., Shea, B., & Grimshaw, J. M. (2008). Health research funding agencies' support and promotion of knowledge translation: An international study. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 86(1), 125–155. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0009.2007.00515.x>

- Timperley, H. S., & Parr, J. M. (2005). Theory competition and the process of change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 6(3), 227–251. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-005-5065-3>
- Vangronigen, B. A., & Meyers, C. V. (2020). Short-cycle school improvement planning as a lever to launch school turnaround: A descriptive analysis of plans. *Teachers College Record*, 122(5), 1–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812012200501>
- Vanlommel, K., & van den Boom-Muilenburg, S. N. (2024). How can we understand and stimulate evidence-informed educational change? A scoping review from a systems perspective. *Journal of Educational Change*, 25(3), 605–634. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-024-09506-z>
- Victorian Auditor General's Office. (2024). *Effectiveness of the Tutor Learning Initiative*. <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/effectiveness-tutor-learning-initiative>
- Viennet, R., & Pont, B. (2017). *Education policy implementation: A literature review and proposed framework* (OECD Education Working Papers No. 162). <https://doi.org/10.1787/fc467a64-en>
- Villegas, M. (2019). Invisible light: Using data to see native youth and families in policy. In E. A. McKinley & L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Indigenous Education* (pp. 955–968). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3899-0_38
- Wallace, M., & Arredondo, S. (2022). *A standardized, equitable, and transparent high-quality instructional materials review process*. Region 15 Comprehensive Center. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED628368>
- Weiss, D., Lillefjell, M., & Magnus, E. (2016). Facilitators for the development and implementation of health promoting policy and programs – a scoping review at the local community level. *BMC Public Health*, 16(1), 140. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-2811-9>
- Wilkinson, J., Edwards-Groves, C., Grootenboer, P., & Kemmis, S. (2019). District offices fostering educational change through instructional leadership practices in Australian Catholic secondary schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 57(5), 501–518. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-09-2018-0179>
- Wilson, S. J., Lipsey, M. W., & Derzon, J. H. (2003). The effects of school-based intervention programs on aggressive behavior: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 71(1), 136–149. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.71.1.136>
- Yeung, A., Craven, R. G., Mooney, M., Tracey, D., Barker, K., Dobia, B., Chen, Z., Schofield, J., & Lewis, T. J. (2016). Positive behavior interventions: The issue of sustainability of positive effects. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(1), 145–170. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9305-7>



For more information visit
edresearch.edu.au

