

# Australian Government, Productivity Commission Submission

## Public Inquiry into National Education Evidence Base

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The following advice relating to two existing national data sets is suggested with the intent to:

1. **improve the effective use of two existing valuable data sets at school level:** 1. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and 2. the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) by removing a barrier that restricts the usefulness of the AEDC data.
  - a. ***This aligns with the Productivity Commission Issue Paper, Scope of Inquiry Recommendation Request #2, “What additional information could be considered and how might it add value to the existing evidence base.”***
2. **remove factors that inhibit the analysis of the AEDC data set (Privacy)**
  - a. ***Scope of Inquiry Recommendation Request #3, “Ways to overcome existing or potential barriers to the sharing of education data. Consideration should include, but not be limited to: privacy concerns”... and***
  - b. ***Scope of Inquiry Recommendation Request #4, “Factors that inhibit access to, and consistency of education-relevant data to support analysis and evidence-based policy development. Consideration should include, but not be limited to: privacy concerns”....***
3. create opportunities for schools to **more cost effectively provide intervention programs** to ‘vulnerable’ and developmentally ‘at risk’ students as identified in the AEDC data thus reducing the correlation between these categories in the AEDC data set and later performance in NAPLAN assessments.
  - a. ***Scope of Inquiry Recommendation Request #4, Factors that inhibit access to, and consistency of education-relevant data to support analysis and evidence-based policy development. Consideration should include, but not be limited to: privacy concerns.... and***
  - b. ***Scope of Inquiry Recommendation Request #6, The costs and benefits of options for improvements to the national education evidence base including the administration and financial impacts on schools and early childhood education and care providers of any suggested change in data collection practices. Consideration should include what opportunities exist to apply efficiencies to existing data collection.***
4. **enable improvement in educational outcomes for Australian children**, which in turn will assist schools to **more effectively meet our National Educational objectives and consequently lift national productivity.**
  - a. ***Scope of Inquiry Recommendation Request #6, The costs and benefits of options for improvements to the national education evidence base including the administration and financial impacts on schools and early childhood education and care providers of any suggested change in data collection practices. Consideration should include what opportunities exist to apply efficiencies to existing data collection.***

Currently, as part of a Research Scholarship, my Deputy Principal and I are conducting research into the ways data sets can be triangulated to improve outcomes for students. The two National Data Sets we are considering are the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), of which, the Data Custodians, are noted in Table 1, of the National Education Evidence Base, Issue Paper, (p. 14) as ACARA (NAPLAN) and DET (AEDC). Our research focuses on the correlation between these two data sets along with other System wide data (P-2 Literacy Testing) and is intended on identifying ways to reduce such correlations by providing educational support and intervention for students in Junior Primary years, at the ‘point of need’ thus reducing the correlation between poor literacy and numeracy performance in later years.

Our school, and many throughout rural Australia has a noticeably transient population as evidenced by School Attendance Records. This occurs for a wide range of economic and climate based reasons throughout the nation. Our research has identified that up to 33% of our student population have either left our school or entered our school within the 3 year time span between their initial AEDC testing and Year 3 NAPLAN assessment, and in some years, over 50% in the 5 years between initial literacy testing and Year 5 NAPLAN assessment. **Consequently, we have no way of knowing whether students identified as developmentally ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’ category in the AEDC data are present in our Year 3 and Year 5 NAPLAN cohorts.**

Given this information, and our knowledge of the correlation that has been identified between vulnerability scores identified in AEDC data and poor levels of reading achievement in NAPLAN Reading results, **we have a recommendation that will enhance schools’ capacity to use their resources to best assist students identified in the ‘Language and Cognitive Skills’ and ‘Communication Skills and General Knowledge’ Vulnerability Category of the AEDC survey.** We strongly believe that our suggestion has the potential to improve student achievement thus reducing this correlation.

As we know, the NAPLAN data provided to schools lists each individual student’s results in a range of ways. This information is used by schools to directly inform intervention supports necessary for students at risk.

We are suggesting that those students identified as being ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’ in the **‘Language and Cognitive Skills’ and ‘Communication Skills and General Knowledge’ subsets ONLY** of the AEDC survey be named **on the secure School Portal only. THIS PORTAL ALREADY EXISTS. However, the information provided to schools is numerical.** This would enable Principals and school staff to channel interventions directly to those most in need, thus optimising the use of government funding and resources available to them. This would enable this support to occur in the Junior Primary years of schooling, as expediently as possible, and would improve student achievement in literacy and numeracy.

This would also enable schools with transient populations such as our own to more effectively analyse the correlation between their National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results and the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data, as it would be possible to identify whether or not the students were present in the Year 3 & Year 5 NAPLAN cohorts.

I raised these recommendations with the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. Simon Birmingham in a letter earlier this year. A return letter emailed last week acknowledged with appreciation our interest in securing access to identified student-level information for Australian Principals to provide support and intervention to students assessed as vulnerable and ‘at risk’ in the AEDC data in the same way as the National Assessment Programme in Literacy and Numeracy data (via a password protected, school based access point).

The letter also explained, that, “The Australian Government provides an undertaking to parents that AEDC data collected will be strictly de-identified to protect the privacy of their children. This therefore precludes the provision of information about individual children to others, including principals,” and invited us to consider making this submission to the Education Evidence Base Public Inquiry.

**We acknowledge this privacy issue but recommend that this be reconsidered in order to better assist these students and more cost effectively use government funding to increase educational outcomes for Australian children and improve our national productivity.**

As mentioned earlier we are suggesting that those students identified as being 'vulnerable' or 'at risk' in the **'Language and Cognitive Skills'** and **'Communication Skills and General Knowledge'** subsets **ONLY** on the AEDC survey be named **on the secure School Portal only**. This would enable Principals and school staff to channel interventions directly to those most in need, thus optimising the use of government funding and resources available to them. This would enable this support to occur in the Junior Primary years of schooling, as expediently as possible, and would improve student achievement in literacy and numeracy. **We are not requesting access to 'Physical Health and Wellbeing', 'Social Competence', or 'Emotional Maturity' information, which we acknowledge could be sensitive for families.**

This submission is support widely by principal colleagues within the Sandhurst Diocese of Catholic Education in Victoria and the Sandhurst Catholic Education Office, Victoria.

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