



Research Agenda 2023



The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) produces a Research Agenda that identifies its high-level annual priority areas. These priorities are underpinned by AERO's vision of achieving excellence and equity in educational outcomes for all children and young people through effective use of evidence.

AERO has 7 priority areas for 2023. These priority areas are continuing from 2021 to 2022, and may continue into future years. AERO has identified these priorities by considering demand (the areas the education community nominate as the most pressing challenges) and impact (the areas the evidence base suggests would most improve excellence and equity in educational outcomes).

Within each priority area, AERO will generate, synthesise and curate rigorous research, so as to present high-quality evidence that is relevant and accessible to education practitioners and policymakers.

1. Literacy and numeracy
2. Wellbeing of children and young people
3. Continuity of learning and development across ECEC and schools
4. Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
5. Addressing educational disadvantage
6. Supporting continuous school improvement
7. Examining evidence use in ECEC and schools



Literacy and numeracy

AERO will undertake research projects that provide practical guidance for practitioners and policymakers in both the school and early childhood education and care (ECEC) sectors. The aim of these projects is to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes of all children and young people.

Rationale: Data from NAPLAN and international assessments suggest that the performance of Australia's students in literacy and numeracy needs to show greater improvement. Literacy and numeracy are critical foundations, equipping students to access learning in all other parts of the curriculum. We need a clearer understanding of which students need more support and in which areas. We also need to translate and make high-quality evidence accessible for teachers so they can know how to better support students' literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- Which literacy and numeracy skills are most in need of improvement? How can teachers best teach these skills?



Wellbeing of children and young people

AERO will undertake research projects that provide practical guidance for practitioners and policymakers in both the school and ECEC sectors. The aim of these projects is to improve wellbeing outcomes so that children and young people are better able to learn and develop.

Rationale: The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration states that education must support the wellbeing, mental health and resilience of young people alongside the focus on literacy, numeracy and learning the curriculum. AERO's consultation with stakeholders has further stressed the importance of managing behaviour and supporting engagement, wellbeing and mental health in our children and young people. Across Australia there is a multitude of resources on wellbeing and engagement, from surveys to frameworks to programs, yet these resources are disparate and there remain many gaps in existing research.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What insights can be gained from systems, schools and ECEC services collecting and analysing data on wellbeing? How can systems, schools and ECEC services best implement these insights to improve learning and development outcomes?



Continuity of learning and development across ECEC and schools

AERO will undertake research projects that help strengthen early learning and development in ECEC services, and its connection to schools. The aim of these projects is to ensure children get the best start in their learning and development, and sustain this across ECEC and school, by strengthening the connection and capacity across the ECEC and school sectors.

Rationale: Every year, approximately 320,000 children transition from preschool to the first year of full-time school, and approximately 650,000 students access outside school hours care services. Practitioners and policymakers need to be equipped with evidence-based strategies for supporting children's learning from the early years through the transition into school, especially those at risk. AERO's consultations also highlighted that connecting learning and development between ECEC and schools can improve learning and development for all children if ECEC services and schools can be supported to learn from and build on each others' strengths.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- How do we support educators, teachers and leaders across ECEC and schools to learn about and implement the science of learning and development and its implications for teaching?
- What insights can be generated for policy and practice by analysing existing large-scale ECEC data sets to better understand the conditions in which effective learning and development occurs?
- How can systems, schools and ECEC services enhance children's transitions between ECEC and schools?



Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

AERO will undertake research projects examining practices and policies across ECEC and schools that will improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Rationale: There has been a plethora of policies and initiatives over the past decade but a persistent gap exists in the academic achievement and educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people compared with others. AERO's consultations with stakeholders have recommended that strengthening education outcomes for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people should be a stand-alone priority for AERO.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What is the evidence base for culturally responsive teaching? How do we best implement these approaches?
- What insights on effective practices and policies can be gained from analysing data on the learning and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people?



Addressing educational disadvantage

AERO will undertake research projects that aim to reduce educational disadvantage. AERO will provide practitioners in both ECEC and schools with practical guidance for improving outcomes for key disadvantaged cohorts. AERO will also undertake research projects that identify promising policy levers to reduce inequity.

Rationale: Research shows that educational disadvantage is faced by many children and young people in Australia, including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, those with disability, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and of limited English proficiency, and those in rural and remote settings. These children and young people often underachieve compared to their more advantaged peers. For example, in PISA 2018, there was a three-year difference in average performance between Australian students in the lowest and highest socio-economic status (SES) quartiles. Practitioners and policymakers need concrete evidence-based guidance so that young Australians of all backgrounds are supported to achieve their full potential.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What are evidence-based approaches for supporting students in mainstream classes that are achieving significantly lower than their peers? How do teachers and schools best implement these approaches?



Supporting continuous school improvement

AERO will undertake research projects that provide practical guidance for school leaders and policymakers to improve student learning outcomes in schools in the middle of the performance spectrum and where achievement levels have not improved for an extended period of time.

Rationale: All Australian children and young people should have the opportunity to learn and develop to their full potential. There are large numbers of students enrolled in schools in the middle of the performance spectrum where achievement levels have not improved for an extended period of time. Identification, synthesis and communication of successful approaches to improve outcomes for students in these schools would support the efforts many school leaders and systems already make in this regard.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What approaches can improve outcomes for students enrolled in schools in the middle of the performance spectrum where achievement levels have not improved for an extended period of time? How do systems and school leaders best implement these approaches?



Examining evidence use in ECEC and schools

This ongoing agenda priority involves research projects that aim to understand the extent to which education practitioners and policymakers in ECEC and schools are currently using evidence and evidence-based practices, as well as any supports and barriers to effectively implementing evidence in their practice.

Rationale: AERO's objectives include generating and making high-quality evidence accessible. However, for this evidence to improve child and student outcomes, practitioners and policymakers need to be motivated, confident and effectively supported to use it in their work. AERO's review of existing research and consultations across the Australian education community have revealed 2 significant barriers to increasing the use of evidence and evidence-based practices:

- there are no valid and reliable measures for assessing the quantity and quality of evidence use
- the most effective strategies for supporting and increasing the use of evidence and evidence-based practices remain unclear.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- How do we measure the effective use of evidence and evidence-based practices? How can practitioners best use these measures to track and develop their own and others' teaching?
- What professional learning and system supports are most successful in encouraging and sustaining evidence-based teaching practices in schools and ECEC services?





The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and Elders past and present.



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