



Office for
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School
Education

Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools 2009

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Introduction

Initially established in response to the *Blueprint for Government Schools* (2003), the School Accountability and Improvement Framework (the Framework) was introduced into Victorian government schools in 2005.

The Framework is constructed around four main elements:

- evaluation of progress via an internal school self-evaluation and an external school review
- planning for improvement via a school strategic plan and an annual implementation plan
- reporting on progress via an annual report to the school community
- managing risk and compliance with legislation and departmental policies via the school compliance checklist.

These elements are not discrete and independent tasks but rather, in keeping with the intent and principles of good governance, are part of a coherent planning and reporting process for organising school improvement efforts.

System improvement initiatives identified in the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development* (2008) are reflected in the Framework to assist in building the collective capacity of schools, networks, regions and the system in continuing to improve and achieve better outcomes for all students.

Overview of the Framework

The elements of the School Accountability and Improvement Framework are the mechanisms by which schools demonstrate accountability. This means that there is no requirement for schools to produce separate plans or reports for different initiatives. Participation in state-wide and regional initiatives such as Literacy Improvement Teams and Building Futures will be evident through the goals, targets, strategies and actions defined in the school's strategic plan and annual implementation plan, with achievements communicated through the annual report to the school community. While program areas may request the collection of other data or information to evaluate initiatives, every endeavour is made to minimise the administrative

workload for schools. The Framework is grounded on the principle that accountability applies across all levels of the system and involves a collective responsibility to work together to improve student outcomes. Each level of the system has a distinct and important role.

For schools, this means taking responsibility for the achievement of all students, for providing high quality education programs, for the ongoing health and sustainability of their school and for the provision of equity and quality in programs.

For networks and regions, it is being accountable for overseeing the performance of their schools, effective provision planning, resource distribution and support.

For the central office, it is being accountable to government and the community for the overall performance of the system and for establishing appropriate policies and frameworks that can support sustained improvement in schools.

The school council is the governing body of the school and plays an important role in accountability and improvement processes. This role involves active participation in planning, review and monitoring of performance. An effective school has a school council that engages in analysis, discussion and debate about school performance as a normal part of its business. School councils endorse the key school planning, evaluation and reporting documents.

School leaders and leadership teams are critical to improving student outcomes. School leaders set the direction for their organisation by ensuring all members of the school understand to whom the school is accountable, for what, and how.

Leadership is the practice of improvement.

Elmore 2006

Assumptions

Underpinning the Framework is a number of fundamental assumptions about how school improvement occurs, informed by the extensive research base on effective schools.

- all students can achieve at the appropriate level, given sufficient time and support

- teaching and learning in all classrooms can be improved
- improvement occurs by improving the knowledge-base, skills and capability that the teacher and student bring to the teaching and learning process
- improving workforce capacity requires professional learning in context, based on effective adult learning principles
- schools improve by ensuring that all programs, activities and services work in concert and support ongoing development in the school
- leadership plays a central role in creating the organisational conditions that enable staff to learn effectively.

The School Accountability and Improvement Framework provides a set of tools and processes to assist schools to organise their improvement efforts.

Design Principles

The Framework is based on the following principles:

Focusing on student outcomes

The Framework sharpens the focus on student outcomes, encouraging schools to be deliberate and purposeful in their approach to continuous school improvement.

Differentiating accountability and compliance

A distinction is drawn between accountability for school performance and the need for schools to comply with legislation, regulation and departmental policy. This has led to the development of the school compliance checklist.

Using an inquiry-based approach

Developing an inquiry approach, prompts and supports schools to work through important questions and continually examine the evidence about their students' achievements. Schools do this by gathering and evaluating information about the quality and effectiveness of strategies used and the nature of the interventions that are likely to impact on performance.

Recognising school difference

Arrangements must be flexible and allow schools to be responsive to the needs of their local communities, make local decisions about what matters, and craft local solutions to cater for the diversity of students in their community. The Framework must be appropriate for a diverse range of schools, including primary schools, secondary schools, P-12 schools, specialist schools, language schools and alternative settings.

Aligning resources to support improvement

Planning strategically means making decisions about aligning resources and personnel with the school's goals and targets so that they will make the most difference.

Strengthening collaboration

The engagement of staff, parents and students in the accountability and improvement cycle is strengthened. This occurs through the development of productive, engaging and supportive relationships both within and between schools and networks, and relationships with other education providers and agencies that support young people and their families.

Sharing responsibility

Accountability applies across all levels of the system: schools, networks, regions and the system, and involves a collective responsibility to work together for improved student outcomes.

Minimising the administrative workload

The Framework streamlines the planning and reporting processes. It allows more time for self-evaluation and strategic planning and simplifies the reporting on current legislative, regulatory and departmental requirements.

Applying rigour

The value of the Framework is in its use as a means for monitoring and reviewing progress in each school, overseen by the Regional Network Leader. Targets are set at the local level based on a thorough analysis of data and agreed upon by the Regional Network Leader. This reflects the importance of acknowledging the school's unique context and the reciprocal responsibility and shared accountability of all levels of the system to support improved school performance.

Implementing the Framework

The Framework provides a coherent process that is critical for the continuous improvement of any organisation and in keeping with principles of good governance. This process allows schools to focus on what matters most and allows leadership teams to access the tools and processes to assist in managing their organisation effectively.

At the centre of the Framework is a set of questions that assists schools to focus evaluation and planning processes on improved outcomes for all students:

1. What outcomes are we trying to achieve for our students? (desired outcomes)
2. What outcomes has the school achieved to date? (current outcomes)
3. What do we have to do to achieve the outcomes we want? (strategies)
4. How will we manage our resources to achieve these outcomes? (resourcing)
5. How will we know whether we are achieving these outcomes? (targets)

1. What outcomes are we trying to achieve for our students?

The Framework defines three broad and inter-related areas of student outcomes:

- student learning
- student engagement and wellbeing
- student pathways and transitions.

All government schools strive to improve in these three student outcome areas, regardless of school type. Within each of the outcome areas, schools have the flexibility to define their goals and targets. These goals and targets will be based on a thorough analysis of student and other school data and with consideration of government priorities for literacy and numeracy, completion and participation.

The three outcomes areas are closely related. For example, greater student engagement is likely to lead to improved retention and better student learning outcomes.

Student learning

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) defines three strands of student learning for students in Years P-10:

- **Physical, personal and social learning** – includes Health and Physical Education, Interpersonal Development, Personal Learning, and Civics and Citizenship
- **Discipline based learning** – includes the Arts, English and Languages Other Than English, the Humanities (Economics, Geography and History), Mathematics and Science
- **Interdisciplinary learning** – includes Communication, Design, Creativity and Technology, Information and Communications Technology, and Thinking.

At this time, the discipline based learning strands have the most extensive array of outcomes data. All schools have data relating to school progress in literacy and numeracy in the School Level Report as well as access to the NAPLAN data service. Data on the other VELS domains is also available as an additional resource to the School Level Report. These data sets are complemented by other school based student assessment data.

Student learning outcomes in the post-compulsory years are defined as achievement in the VCE, VCAL and VET in Schools (including School Based New Apprenticeships). The School Level Report and VCE data service summarises this information for schools.

Student engagement and wellbeing

Promoting students' engagement in learning and wellbeing at school is an essential goal for all schools.

Measures of student engagement and wellbeing include student attendance, students' ratings of their connectedness to school, motivation to learn or safety (Student Attitudes to School survey), teacher assessments of student motivation (Staff Opinion survey) and parents' perceptions of school

climate (Parent Opinion survey). Information collected at the school level can also be used e.g. bullying data, participation in support programs etc.

Student pathways and transitions

Pathways and transitions relates to the movement of students from one educational experience to another (into, through, or out of a particular educational context), and the quality of that process. This outcome area is therefore applicable to all types of government schools.

In the compulsory years, key transitions include kindergarten to school, early years to middle years, and primary school to secondary school. Other transitions include students who move between schools, or who move from specialist schools or language schools into primary or secondary schools. Student movement from one year level to the next are also crucial transition points.

In the post compulsory years, this outcome area focuses on retention, the type of studies being undertaken (VCE, VCAL, VET in Schools) as well as student destinations after leaving the school. It also includes the quality of the student's experience in moving from Year 10 to VCE or other post-compulsory options.

The system makes available a number of data sets for post-compulsory pathways and transitions (retention, participation and completion of VCE, VCAL, VET in Schools, On Track). For the compulsory years, the Parent Opinion survey includes a measure on parent perceptions of the quality of support for student transitions.

At the school level, many schools already collect information on parent and student satisfaction with transitions into, through, and out of the school.

2. What outcomes has the school achieved to date?

Schools need to have a clear picture of current student progress in relation to each student learning outcome in order to establish challenging, yet achievable goals and targets for improvement.

In addition to the data contained in the School Level Report, schools are encouraged to use other information that contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of levels of student performance.

Comprehensive analysis of data leads to a better understanding of the quality of educational programs and practice, the equity of policies, structures and programs, and the effective use of resources.

The essence of accountability is looking forward, using data to inform judgments about current performance and formulate plans for reasonable actions.

Earl and Katz, 2006

3. What do we have to do to achieve the outcomes we want?

Schools are encouraged to reflect on their current operations and practices, to identify and develop the key strategies required to achieve the desired student outcomes.

The Effective Schools Model (see Figure 1) provides a framework for examining current practice and selecting key improvement strategies.

Each correlate of the Effective Schools Model covers an important aspect of school operations and practice and can be used to generate questions about how the day-to-day work of the school is conducted both in and out of the classroom.

Figure 1: The Effective Schools Model



Discussion about effective practice can inform the identification of strategies the school needs to adopt

to build on strengths and opportunities and manage risks.

Strategies commonly used by schools include improving pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, student reporting, whole school curriculum planning, community engagement, leadership structure as well as organisational climate.

4. How will we manage our resources to achieve these outcomes?

The Framework assists schools to reflect upon and plan for how they allocate staff, time, space, funding, ICT and facilities to the key improvement strategies that support the achievement of the school goals and targets.

In regard to facilities, the School Accountability and Improvement Framework has synergies with Building Futures. The Building Futures six-stage policy framework guides investment in Victorian school infrastructure and facilities to ensure that expenditure on educational assets generates significant gains in educational achievement. The Building Futures process identifies, plans, delivers and evaluates capital works projects with a consistent core focus on improving student outcomes by designing schools that meet contemporary educational needs.

Successful Building Futures projects demonstrate strong links between learning environments, teaching and learning and improved student outcomes and facilities

5. How will we know whether we are achieving these outcomes?

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the key improvement strategies is important. This is achieved through reflection on practice and comprehensive processes of collection and analysis of performance information.

The Framework includes annual reporting and four-yearly self-evaluation and review. Together these processes allow schools to make judgments about progress towards the achievement of school goals, targets and the key improvement strategies.

Elements of the School Accountability and Improvement Framework

The School Accountability and Improvement Framework consists of processes for self-evaluation and review, strategic planning and reporting.

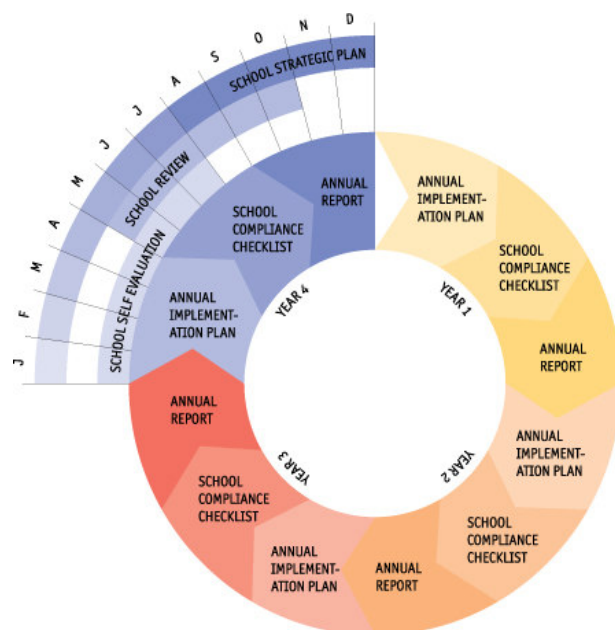
These elements are connected through a four-year planning and review cycle, and an annual cycle of implementation and reporting.

The Four-Year Cycle – Self-Evaluation, Review and Strategic Planning

The four-year cycle allows sufficient time for implementation of the key improvement strategies prior to self-evaluation and review, and for preparation of the next school strategic plan.

Within the Framework schools spend a year in self-evaluation, review and strategic planning for the next cycle. The school self-evaluation occurs in Terms 1 or 2 and school reviews are conducted in Terms 2 or 3, thereby allowing for completion of the new school strategic plan in the same school year.

Figure 2: Cycles within the SAIF



School Self-Evaluation

School self-evaluation provides an opportunity for the whole school community, including students,

parents and all staff, to reflect on student outcomes in light of their goals, targets and key improvement strategies from the previous planning cycle. This includes examining teaching and learning strategies, the performance and development culture and other aspects of school operations so they can be strengthened and supported to improve student outcomes.

Effective schools consistently reflect on their performance as a matter of course. School self-evaluation merely formalises this process and makes the process accessible to all school communities.

The school self-evaluation process utilises the Effective Schools Model to assist schools to evaluate current practice and inform the selection of improvement strategies.

School Review

School review follows directly from the school self-evaluation.

With expertise in school improvement, the external reviewer (or critical friend in the case of negotiated review), provides advice on improvement strategies that will ultimately help shape the school's strategic plan. During the review, the reviewer analyses the school's performance data, the school's self-evaluation and additional information to formulate recommendations for the school via a review report.

Schools undertake different types of review to reflect their particular needs. The types of review are as follows:

Negotiated review is flexible and focussed whereby the school uses a critical friend to examine a specific area for improvement identified from the school self-evaluation. This type of review is usually used for schools with student outcomes and other key indicators above expected levels, although the school's capacity to manage such a review is also considered.

Continuous improvement review involves a pre-visit from the reviewer, a day-long review panel meeting with the principal, school council president and key staff (which can incorporate a focus group with students), plus a report to staff and the school council. This type of review is usually used for schools with satisfactory student outcomes and

other key indicators, but with scope for improvement.

Diagnostic review is used with schools with some student outcomes and other key indicators below expected levels, or where the circumstances of the school are complex, such as a multi-campus school, a P-12 school, a school with a large number of students with disabilities, or a recently amalgamated school. The review has a similar structure to continuous improvement review but provides for an additional day of fieldwork.

Extended diagnostic review follows a similar structure to the diagnostic review with a pre-visit, fieldwork, presentations and report, but provides four days of fieldwork in the school to enable a greater depth of inquiry and interaction. This type of review is for schools requiring immediate assessment and intervention, and can occur at any time of year.

School Strategic Plan

The school strategic plan is a concise document that enables everyone in the school community, including students, parents and all staff, to know what the school is aiming to achieve over the next four years and how it intends to achieve these outcomes.

The school strategic plan comprises three distinct parts: the school profile, strategic intent and indicative planner.

School profile

Developing the school profile provides an opportunity for the school to articulate their purpose, values and the influence of current and future environmental contexts. Schools can commence exploring and developing the school profile early in their year of self-evaluation, review and planning as this analysis is needed as a foundation for establishing the strategic intent of the school.

Strategic intent

The second component of the school strategic plan, the strategic intent, draws on the evidence and analysis generated by the school self-evaluation and review. This element represents the school's plan for action and is composed of the goals,

targets and key improvement strategies identified to support improvement.

Goals are aspirational statements that define what the school is striving to achieve in terms of improved student outcomes.

For each goal, schools are required to set a target or targets that indicate how the school will measure achievement of its goals. Targets should be measurable, realistic yet challenging, and achievable within the timeframe of the strategic plan. Targets should be set against the school's own performance (rather than state means) to ensure they are meaningful for the school and understood by the school community.

Key improvement strategies are high level directions that the school will use to achieve its goals and targets. They are likely to take several years to implement and include a number of actions. Implementation is rolled-out through annual implementation plans that outline the actions required to support implementation of the strategy.

The key improvement strategies are important components of what Elmore (2004) would call the school's 'theory of action'; that is, the logically connected steps or actions that need to be put into place to achieve improvement and the assumptions that underpin these activities. For example, a school's theory of action could include the notion that if teachers participate in targeted professional learning that is aligned with the school's teaching and learning priorities, then this action will improve teacher practice, which will in turn improves student learning outcomes.

It is important that the leadership of the school can articulate their theory of action so that staff understand why they are doing what they do and what they are aiming to achieve. Therefore, as part of their strategic intent, schools may choose to map out the most appropriate sequence of actions in order to achieve the school's goals and targets.

Indicative planner

The indicative planner assists schools to prioritise their key improvements strategies and to plan at a high level the supporting activities year by year. Most importantly, the planner provides an opportunity for the school to identify the desired changes in practice and behaviours that will support the implementation of the key improvement

strategies. These achievement milestones should be observable changes in teaching and learning practices that can be used to indicate change and progress in the implementation of the key improvement strategies.

The school strategic plan – a living document

The school strategic plan reflects the community's expectations and the Government's priorities for education and early childhood development. It is a formal understanding between the school council, the school community and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Regional Network Leaders quality assure and endorse school strategic plans, including the goals, targets and strategies they contain. School strategic plans will also need to be developed with an awareness of the need to support the achievement of specifically identified goals and targets identified within the network strategic plan.

While the cycle specifies a four-year planning period, the strategic plan is a 'living' document - it can be updated to take into account changes in the school's environment or data.

Significant departmental programs or initiatives in which the school is engaged can be readily integrated into the school strategic plan, as they are each designed to contribute either directly or indirectly to improved student outcomes. For example the E5 Instructional model, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, Principles of Learning and Teaching, and Managed Individual Pathways are clearly linked to improved student outcomes in one or all of the three student outcome areas.

Participation in these programs and initiatives can therefore be incorporated into the school strategic plan as part of a key improvement strategy. The benefit of integrating these initiatives into a single strategic plan is that the school can clearly state what outcomes these initiatives are trying to achieve. Furthermore, a single strategic plan and single annual implementation plan removes the need for separate planning and accountability arrangements for different initiatives, streamlining the administrative workload of planning and reporting.

The One-Year Cycle – Planning and Reporting

Annual Implementation Plan

At the end of each year schools develop an annual implementation plan that describes how the key improvement strategies in the school strategic plan will be put into operation in the following year and how they will be monitored. The annual implementation plan also incorporates other significant projects to be undertaken by the school in that year. It is not a stand-alone document but flows from the school strategic plan.

The annual implementation plan outlines the:

- actions that will be undertaken in order to implement the key improvement strategies and significant projects
- resources to support the implementation of the action, who is to be involved and associated timelines
- achievement milestones that will be used to assess the desired changes in practice or behaviour that should occur through the implementation of strategies
- one-year targets to identify progress towards the targets for improved student outcomes identified in the school strategic plan.

The annual implementation plan assists the school community to be clear about what actions it is aiming to implement in the year, and how this will lead towards the achievement of the school's goals and targets in the school strategic plan.

Annual implementation planning assists schools to:

- plan their work for the coming year
- ensure efficient and effective allocation of resources to complete the work
- monitor progress and success.

Whilst plans may be amended up to 31 March in a given year, a sound planning cycle would see the school's annual implementation plan defined by the end of the year prior to its implementation.

It may be necessary, however, to adjust the annual implementation plan during Term 1 after actual school enrolments are known and the school has undertaken the necessary reflection on school performance through the annual reporting process.

Annual Report to the Community

The annual report provides an opportunity for the school council, leadership team, staff and students to reflect on the success or otherwise of their improvement strategies and the allocation of resources, and informs planning for improvement in the following year.

An annual report must be officially endorsed at a meeting of school council before it is submitted to the regional office.

Annual reports are submitted to the regional office by 31 March each year.

School Compliance Checklist

The school compliance checklist is an on-line, interactive web-form designed to assist schools comply with key legislative, regulatory and policy requirements. .

The checklist assists schools by:

- identifying all policy and legislative items with which they are required to be compliant
- linking to relevant policies and legislative requirements
- linking to good practice examples to work from
- identifying the right person to contact for further information on the requirement
- consolidating reporting and minimising duplication
- supporting records management of documents related to the policy/legislative items at the school level.

Using the checklist, schools will self-assess their level of compliance with legislative and policy requirements in the following areas:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ▪ facilities management | ▪ ICT management |
| ▪ financial management | ▪ risk management |
| ▪ governance | ▪ student engagement and wellbeing |
| ▪ human resource management | ▪ student learning |
| | ▪ student pathways and transitions |

The data derived from the checklist will enable regions, the central office and program areas to better understand the nature and extent of issues across the system, and to tailor resources and support.

Links Between School Level Planning and Individual Performance and Development Plans

Planning occurs at two levels; the school level and at the level of individual principals and staff.

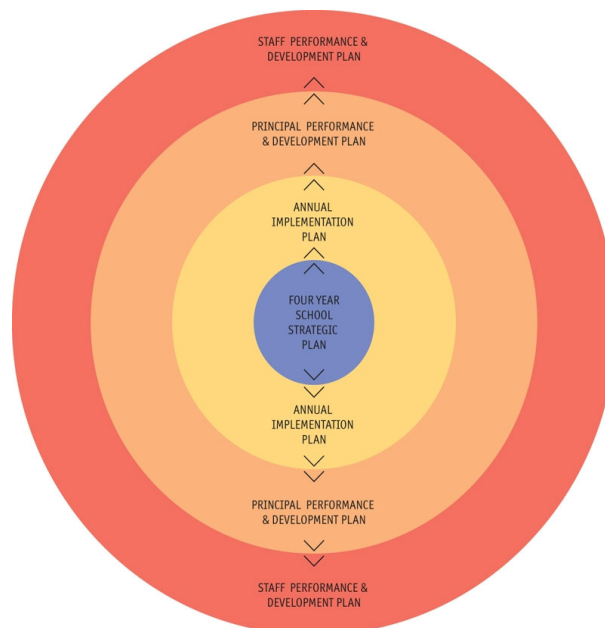
Planning at the school level comprises the school strategic plan and the annual implementation plan. Schools may choose to develop school policies and detailed project plans to underpin the annual

implementation plan. School level planning informs the development of the principal's performance and development plan.

The principal class performance and development plan focuses on the role the individual will play in contributing to achieving the school's goals, targets and key improvement strategies and the targeted professional learning required to achieve this. Staff performance and development plans will also be informed by school level planning.

Figure 3 illustrates the alignment between individual performance and development planning and the school's strategic and annual implementation plans.

Figure 3: Relationship between school level planning and individual planning



Ongoing Improvement

Each year, the Framework and the guidelines underpinning each element of the Framework are reviewed and updated to ensure they reflect changes in the context of Victorian education, as well as growing understanding of how schools improve. This documentation is complemented by opportunities for professional learning co-ordinated by the regional offices.

Conclusion

The School Accountability and Improvement Framework works at each level of Victoria's government school system:

- for schools it provides coherence to their improvement efforts, clarifies accountabilities and streamlines processes
- for Regional Network Leaders and regions it focuses and strengthens their role in providing support and guidance for school leaders and staff
- for the system it strengthens the alignment of programs and projects that have shared goals and ensures that maximum benefit is obtained from resources.

The Framework makes our partnership for improved outcomes for all students more explicit and achievable by translating high expectations into clear accountabilities for all levels of the system.

Further Support and Information

Further information on the School Accountability and Improvement Framework and its components is located at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schoolimprovement/accountability/default.htm>

Regional Network Leaders and regional accountability and improvement personnel can provide further assistance to schools. A list of regional accountability and improvement personnel is located at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schoolimprovement/accountability/default.htm>

To contact the School Workforce Reform and School Improvement Division regarding the School Accountability and Improvement Framework, please email schoolaccountability@edumail.vic.gov.au

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