Australian Education Research Organisation

Discussion paper

Insights into implementation in 2025

What AERO is learning alongside schools about implementing evidence-based teaching practices

August 2025

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.

AERO would like to acknowledge the contributions of every school staff member we have worked with in the Learning Partner project, and, particularly, each school implementation team.

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.

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

Australian Education Research Organisation. (2025). *Insights into implementation in 2025: What AERO is learning about implementing evidence-based teaching practices.* https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/discussion-papers/insights-implementation-2025

Publication details

ISBN 978-1-923066-64-9 (online)
Images: AERO

Contents

Background 5

The Learning Partner project 7

- Working alongside schools 7
- Iterations of the project so far 8
- Sharing learning about promising approaches to implementation 8

Insights into implementation (so far) 10

- Insight 1: A deliberate and structured approach to implementation is a promising way to build implementation leadership, strengthen teaching practice and improve student outcomes 12
- Insight 2: Implementation teams need support, too 13
- Insight 3: Tailoring implementation to context is a dynamic, collaborative process 14
- Insight 4: Systematically addressing enablers and barriers adds value in multiple and unexpected ways 16
- Insight 5: A handful of well-chosen, carefully sequenced implementation strategies is worth more than a long list of strategies 17
- Insight 6: The road to sustainability is paved with a deliberate and structured approach 18

How we're responding to our learning in 2025 20

- Exploring levels of implementation support to implementation teams 20
- Further tailoring to school context 20
- Further operationalising the 4 implementation components 20
- Encouraging sustainability 20

What's next in 2026 and beyond 21

References 22

Figure

Figure 1: A deliberate and structured approach to implementing evidence-based teaching practices in schools

Tables

Table 1: Schools working with AERO in the Learning Partner project 7

Table 2: Insights into implementation based on our Learning Partner work in 2024 10

Table 3: Promising indications of a deliberate and structured approach identified in the 2024 formative evaluation 12

For all students to benefit from effective teaching, evidence-based teaching practices need to be successfully implemented. The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has been working closely with Australian schools and systems to learn about promising approaches for implementing evidence-based teaching practices in different school contexts. This discussion paper is the second in a series that shares insights from our work with schools in the Learning Partner project.

Background

Without successful implementation, evidence-based teaching practices languish as good ideas. As part of the broader Australian education community, AERO is, therefore, committed to encouraging the adoption and effective implementation of evidence in practice.

In August 2024, AERO's school implementation team published our first Insights into Implementation discussion paper. That paper described why implementation is important, explained AERO's role in encouraging the adoption and effective implementation of evidence in schools, set out what we mean by a *deliberate and structured approach* to implementation (see Box 1), and detailed our insights into implementation based on the Learning Partner project in 2023.

We are committed to sharing what we learn over time. This 2025 discussion paper builds on our first discussion paper by detailing insights from our Learning Partner work in 2024.

Box 1: A deliberate and structured approach to implementation

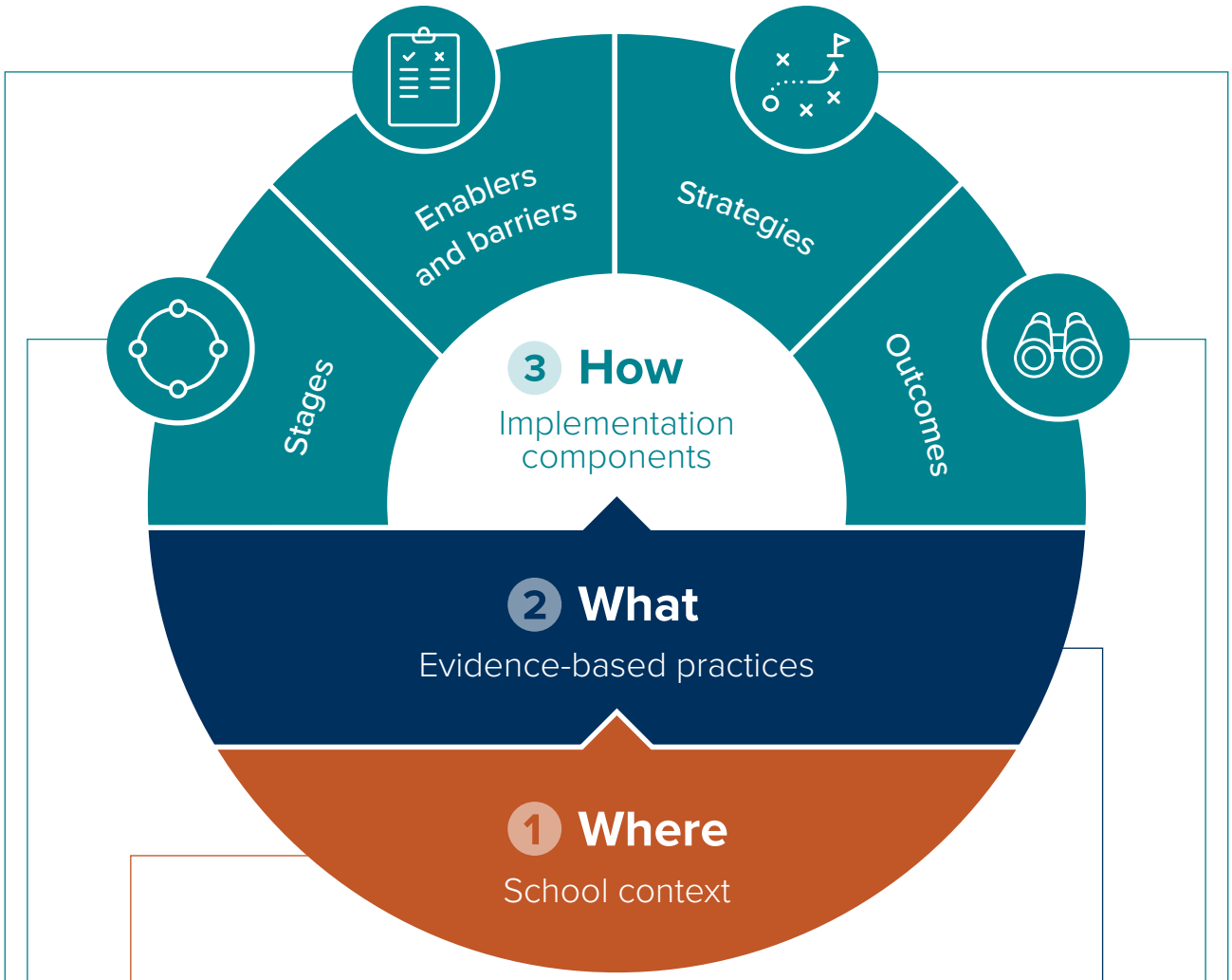
AERO has developed a deliberate and structured approach to implementation of evidence-based teaching practices in schools (Figure 1). When being *deliberate*, leaders intentionally commit to and plan for the implementation process. When taking a *structured* approach, leaders systematically use reliable implementation components to inform the implementation process.

A deliberate and structured approach to implementation is grounded in school context (the 'where'), focuses on an evidence-based teaching practice (the 'what') and relies on 4 implementation components (the 'how'). These 4 implementation components are:

- using a staged approach
- addressing enablers and barriers
- using implementation strategies
- monitoring implementation outcomes.

This approach has been developed based on key concepts from implementation literature, operationalised and refined through real-time reflections from the Learning Partner project. To learn more about AERO's deliberate and structured approach to implementation, see our published explainers and resources on implementing evidence-based teaching practices in schools.

Figure 1: A deliberate and structured approach to implementing evidence-based teaching practices in schools



Tailor implementation of evidence-based practices to the specific school setting
What does our school context mean for the 'what' and 'how' of implementation?

Choose practices to implement that are backed by rigorous research
What is the rigour and relevance of the research underpinning the practices?

Engage in a structured and phased approach to implementation
Where are we up to?

Establish and monitor implementation outcomes
Are we implementing successfully?

Identify and act on what's helping and hindering implementation
What's helping? What's getting in the way?

Select and use implementation strategies
What strategies will we use to support implementation success?

The Learning Partner project

Working alongside schools

In the Learning Partner project, AERO works with school leaders, classroom teachers and regional system teams[1] to better understand the implementation of evidence-based teaching practices in different school contexts. This project enables AERO to learn alongside those who work in schools every day to ensure effective practices are adopted, used with fidelity and sustained over time to enhance teaching and learning. Through this collaboration, key ideas from implementation research can be operationalised in ways that are appropriate and feasible for Australian schools.

To date, 53 schools across 3 cohorts have participated in the Learning Partner project (Table 1). These schools are located in both urban and regional environments and are from government and Catholic sectors. All have been focused on implementing explicit instruction.[2]

Table 1: Schools working with AERO in the Learning Partner project

Year	Total participating schools	Schools in their first year of the project	Schools in their second year of the project	State and sector	Implementation focus
2023	9 primary schools	9 schools (Cohort 1)	N/A	New South Wales (government), Queensland (Catholic) and Victoria (government)	Explicit instruction in either mathematics or writing across Years 3 to 6
2024	14 primary schools	6 schools (Cohort 2)	8 schools (Cohort 1)	New South Wales (government), Queensland (Catholic), South Australia (Catholic) and Victoria (government)	Explicit instruction in either mathematics or writing, at the whole-school level
2025	44 schools, including 35 primary and 9 secondary	38 schools (Cohort 3)	6 schools (Cohort 2)		Primary schools: Explicit instruction in either mathematics, vocabulary, reading or writing, usually at the whole-school level. Secondary schools: Explicit instruction in multiple learning areas, usually starting with one year level.

1 By 'regional system teams', we mean teams of education officers employed by systems. These officers provide strategic and pedagogical support for networks of school leaders, and work in regional (rather than central) system roles.

2 To implement the pedagogical approach of explicit instruction, Learning Partner schools have focused on a number of the evidence-based teaching practices that align with how students learn in AERO's model of learning and teaching. These practices have included rules and routines, chunk content, explain learning objectives and teach explicitly.

Schools join the project for up to 2 years. During the first year, an AERO Implementation Consultant works closely with school staff to understand the context of their school and guide the use of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation. In the second year, schools receive lighter-touch support. During that year, schools often move into later stages of implementation and leaders plan how to sustain and/or scale up their implementation efforts.

Iterations of the project so far

Our first iteration of the Learning Partner project in 2023 had a strong focus on how school leaders could use key concepts from implementation research on a day-to-day basis to help guide the implementation process and support improvement in teaching practice.

In 2024, we refined several elements of the project based on reflections from our first year. For example, we:

- partnered with schools across a broader range of socio-economic backgrounds to ensure our insights included varied school contexts
- supported the creation of school implementation teams to lead the implementation process in each school, which also focused on whole-school efforts rather than implementation within specific year levels
- provided more support for leaders to develop their understanding of both explicit instruction and implementation processes to build local capacity for leading implementation efforts.

In 2025, we are continuing to build on our learning. For example, we are working with regional system teams and supporting a larger number of schools in a wider range of contexts (see How we're responding to our learning in 2025).

Sharing learning about promising approaches to implementation

One of the key objectives of the Learning Partner project is to learn about promising approaches for implementing evidence-based teaching practices in Australian schools and then share our learning with the broader education community. More specifically, we aim to learn how those leading and supporting implementation efforts in schools can apply key ideas from implementation research in ways that are appropriate and feasible for them.

To present the most relevant and actionable learning for school and system leaders, this discussion paper draws on 2 sources:

1. a formative evaluation of the Learning Partner project carried out in 2024. Details about this evaluation are included in Box 2.
2. the AERO school implementation team's ongoing monitoring and observations of the project since it began. This monitoring and observation work has involved gathering project data (e.g., time spent using different implementation strategies) and ongoing learning and reflections (e.g., via internal meeting notes, lesson observations and quarterly implementation progress reports provided by Learning Partner schools).

Using these 2 sources, this discussion paper provides our interpretation of what we are hearing about implementation of evidence-based teaching practices on the ground in schools. It interprets advice for the wider Australian education community, rather than only those involved in the Learning Partner project. It also presents learning at a point in time that builds on knowledge gained over multiple years of the project. While informed by the 2024 formative evaluation, this discussion paper is not a summary of the evaluation or a presentation of research findings.

Box 2: The 2024 formative evaluation

Given the complex and dynamic nature of implementation in schools and the relatively recent focus on evidence-informed implementation in education (Moore et al., 2024), frequent refinements to the Learning Partner project are an important part of its design. To support this iterative work, each year of the project has involved a formative evaluation (an evaluation that focuses on real-time learning while the project is running, rather than on outcomes collected at the end of the project).

The 2024 formative evaluation was carried out by a dedicated evaluation project team at AERO. The evaluation involved school leaders and teachers from the 14 schools participating in the project in 2024 (that is, from 6 schools in their first year of the project and 8 schools in their second year of the project).

Data was collected at the start, middle and end of the school year. For schools in their first year of the project, data was collected from school leaders and classroom teachers through 2 online surveys (with 189 responses), 46 interviews and 13 discussion groups. For schools in their second year of the project, 24 interviews were held with school leaders.

Participating school leaders and classroom teachers provided feedback about:

» their experience with the Learning Partner project

» aspects they found most useful and aspects that could be improved

» what (if any) benefits they experienced or observed, including their perceived benefits for students.

To ensure data collection extended beyond self-reported perceptions, surveys for teachers included questions to check their knowledge of explicit instruction, and surveys for school leaders included questions to check their knowledge of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation (collectively, 'knowledge checks'). While unable to directly compare different iterations of the Learning Partner project, the 2024 formative evaluation was able to capture feedback about some of the changes made between 2023 and 2024 (e.g., whether school leaders found support for building their implementation leadership capacity to be useful). Interviews with school leaders in their second year of the project were also able to explore those leaders' experiences with the project over a longer time.

Future iterations of the Learning Partner project may incorporate an evaluation of the impact of a structured and deliberate approach to implementation on measured student outcomes. Developing validated tools to measure various outcomes and incorporating larger sample sizes will also be a focus of future evaluations.

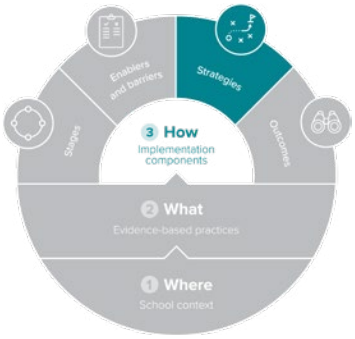
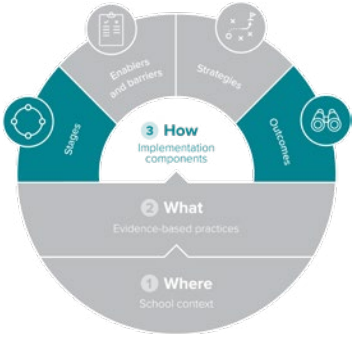
Insights into implementation (so far)

Through the 2024 formative evaluation and our ongoing project observations, we have continued to learn a great deal about implementation of evidence-based teaching practices in Australian contexts.

Table 2 summarises our key insights and how they relate to AERO's deliberate and structured approach to implementation. Each insight is detailed in the sections that follow.

Table 2: Insights into implementation based on our Learning Partner work in 2024

Insight	Connection with a deliberate and structured approach	Summary
1. A deliberate and structured approach to implementation is a promising way to build implementation leadership, strengthen teaching practice and improve student outcomes.		• A second year of the Learning Partner project provides further evidence supporting the use of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation. • In particular, the approach shows promise for building leaders' knowledge and skills in implementation and teachers' use of the practice being implemented, for the ultimate benefit of students.
2. Implementation teams need support, too.		• Implementation teams should be intentionally formed and supported over time, including to build their knowledge and skills in taking a deliberate and structured approach to implementation.
3. Tailoring implementation to context is a dynamic, collaborative process.		• Tailoring implementation to context requires decisions based on evolving data and diverse perspectives. • All 4 components of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation can assist with tailoring to context.

Insight	Connection with a deliberate and structured approach	Summary
4. Systematically addressing enablers and barriers adds value in multiple and unexpected ways.		• Systematically identifying and addressing enablers and barriers at multiple timepoints provides a data-informed, detailed understanding of factors that help or hinder implementation.
5. A handful of well-chosen, carefully sequenced implementation strategies is worth more than a long list of strategies.		• Implementation teams should select a limited number of implementation strategies and combine and sequence these strategies where appropriate. • Supplementing knowledge-building sessions with modelling and coaching is particularly valuable.
6. The road to sustainability is paved with a deliberate and structured approach.		• Reaching sustainability is challenging, but key enabling factors positively influence sustainability of both the implementation approach and the practice being implemented.

Insight 1: A deliberate and structured approach to implementation is a promising way to build implementation leadership, strengthen teaching practice and improve student outcomes

Similarly to the first year,[3] a second year of the Learning Partner project has again provided promising indications that taking a deliberate and structured approach to implementation can strengthen teaching practice and provide perceived benefits for students. Additionally, the 2024 formative evaluation identified promising indications for school leaders' implementation leadership. Table 3 summarises these promising indications.

Table 3: Promising indications of a deliberate and structured approach identified in the 2024 formative evaluation

Overall, evaluation participants reported:	Evaluation source
For school leaders	
Improved knowledge of, and skills in using, a deliberate and structured approach to implementation	School leader interviews, surveys and knowledge checks
Increased consistency of explicit instruction practice across their school	School leader interviews
For teachers	
Improved knowledge, skills and use of explicit instruction	Teacher surveys and knowledge checks
Increased confidence in using explicit instruction	School leader interviews
For students (as perceived by teachers and/or school leaders)	
Increased understanding of lesson content and intended learning outcomes	Teacher and school leader interviews
Increased engagement in lessons	
Improved behaviour and academic outcomes	School leader interviews

While further work is needed to fully test AERO's deliberate and structured approach to implementation, 2 years of promising indications from formative evaluations of the project provide the impetus to continue using and refining this approach.

3 Promising indications from the Learning Partner work in 2023 are described in our first Insights into Implementation discussion paper, published in 2024.

Insight 2: Implementation teams need support, too

In 2024, we learnt more about what implementation leadership looks like in schools and how to support it. In particular, we learnt about the value of leading implementation through implementation teams that are intentionally formed and supported over time. This extends the well-established idea that support from school leaders is a significant enabler for implementation (Dagenais et al., 2012; Kirk et al., 2015).

Building and operating implementation teams goes beyond simply bringing a group together and assigning responsibility for different aspects of the implementation process. Through our Learning Partner project work and relevant implementation literature (e.g., National Implementation Research Network, 2015), we are learning how important it is that the team:

- consists of carefully selected members who can lead implementation (and who will ideally include but not be limited to school leaders)[4]
- distributes specific implementation roles across team members (e.g., so the team has the authority and expertise to make resourcing decisions, understands the practice being implemented and tailors implementation to fit school context)
- forms around a common purpose
- has shared accountability
- protects time for structured implementation team meetings.

Through our Learning Partner project work, we also learnt more about how best to support implementation leaders to build their knowledge and skills in implementation.[5] For example, members of the implementation team must be supported to build their knowledge and skills in *taking a deliberate and structured approach* so they can carry out their specific functions in their implementation team and collectively use the 4 implementation components to guide their decisions and actions. Any school leaders who are not part of the implementation team should at least be supported to build their awareness and knowledge of *why implementation is important*, so all leaders can be united in their support for implementation efforts. Such capacity building needs to start during the early Explore and Prepare stages of implementation – a time when a number of critical decisions are made about what and how implementation will occur.

4 Team membership will depend on many factors, including school size. Commonly, the implementation team will include members who do not have official school executive roles (e.g., year level coordinators who closely relate to staff involved in implementation efforts and/or community representative(s) who can advise on tailoring to context). Conversely, not all school leaders may be members of the implementation team.

5 This capacity building in implementation leadership occurred in various ways, including through leader-specific professional learning modules, regular conversations with the AERO Implementation Consultant, school Implementation Coordinators upskilling other school leaders, and training in particular implementation strategies such as coaching.

School leaders participating in the 2024 formative evaluation reported various benefits in building their own and others' knowledge and skills in implementation. For example, this capacity building was seen to:

- encourage these leaders to take ownership of the change process
- enable leaders to discuss and reflect on implementation learning with others in their school
- equip leaders to use a similar approach for other implementation challenges in their school
- buffer implementation efforts from changes, such as a single Implementation Coordinator leaving the school.

In an interview for the 2024 formative evaluation, one school principal noted that:

> Being part of the implementation leadership practice and coaching has been invaluable for us. How we can best utilise the knowledge we're getting from a leadership point of view to embed the work that's been happening in the classrooms has been awesome.

Insight 3: Tailoring implementation to context is a dynamic, collaborative process

Implementation processes should be adapted to fit each school's context, though not to the point where structure and rigour are lost (AERO, 2024).

In 2024, we were frequently reminded how context changes over time and how the process of adapting to context must be driven by those within schools. For these reasons, implementation efforts cannot be reduced to a standard checklist of sequential steps. Instead, context is woven throughout a deliberate and structured approach. Schools:

- work through key activities at each stage and progress in their own time
- respond to enablers and barriers that are specific to their setting
- select and tailor implementation strategies to meet the needs of their staff
- use implementation outcomes to monitor the health of implementation, making changes in response to these data.

Tailoring to context requires implementation teams to make decisions based on evolving data, including the diverse perspectives and experiences of those involved in the implementation process. For example, at one Learning Partner school, it became apparent that modelling and coaching needed to be tailored to demonstrate what explicit instruction practices looked like in classes of students with significant support needs. Accordingly, coaching structures were adjusted to allow greater input from a school leader with this expertise. Adjusting coaching in this way allowed teachers to better understand how to use the explicit instruction techniques in their classrooms.

All 4 implementation components – namely, stages, enablers and barriers, strategies and outcomes – provide structures that support implementation teams to tailor appropriately to their context. For example, the 2024 formative evaluation reiterated how leaders value both the structure and flexibility of *implementation stages*. Leaders recognised the importance of deliberately moving back and forth between stages if returning to an earlier stage or spending more time in a particular stage were needed to strengthen implementation. As one Implementation Coordinator noted:

> I think the knowledge building of my [school] Exec around how fluid and flexible implementation has to be – not just this straight line of we're going to do this and we're going to get there, and we plough ahead no matter what all of that helped that understanding.

Other implementation components similarly support tailoring to context. For example:

- The specific mix of priority *enablers and barriers* will be unique to each implementation effort. Different priority enablers and barriers should prompt different responses.
  - For example, for one school, a priority barrier might be the lack of alignment between their selected evidence-based teaching practice and their existing model of teaching, while a priority enabler is the strong agreement from staff that implementing the practice is better than keeping things as they are. For another school, a priority barrier might be limited agreement that the evidence-based teaching practice is something the school needs to work on, but wider policies support its implementation.
- Even if schools use the same core *implementation strategies* (such as professional learning cycles), what those strategies look like in each school differs based on what is appropriate and feasible in each school's unique context.
  - For example, aspects of professional learning cycles differed in Learning Partner schools according to who did what, whether modelling and coaching were 1:1 or in groups, how long each activity was used and how long the entire professional learning cycle lasted.
- Monitoring the *implementation outcome* of fidelity (for example, through classroom observations) not only helped implementation teams learn which strategies were fully implemented but also helped coaching teams decide who needed greater access to strategies like modelling and coaching.

Insight 4: Systematically addressing enablers and barriers adds value in multiple and unexpected ways

One component of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation involves factors that help or hinder the implementation of evidence-based teaching practices – that is, enablers and barriers.

Prior to engaging with the Learning Partner project, few school leaders had attempted to systematically understand and address enablers and barriers when implementing an evidence-based teaching practice. In the Learning Partner project, school staff complete an activity to identify, prioritise between and act upon key enablers and barriers. This activity, combined with regular discussions among implementation teams about enablers and barriers, provides a data-informed, detailed understanding of factors that help or hinder implementation. This effort goes beyond discussions that may typically take place in schools about high-level or well-known factors that make change difficult (e.g., lack of time). Instead, it supports implementation teams to be precise and focused in taking action to reduce barriers that are making their implementation process challenging, and to enhance enablers that pave the way for sustained implementation.

In the 2024 formative evaluation, school leaders reported that they highly valued discussions to identify and act on enablers and barriers in this systematic way. One school principal reflected on the value of enabler and barrier discussions compared with previous change efforts:

> I think we [usually] make a lot of assumptions on what the barriers will be without actually knowing. And then being able to tackle what we do using those – that's something that I would love to bring into anything that we drive change around.

Leaders also noted that, in a trusting environment, staff felt comfortable sharing their views on factors that were helping and hindering implementation. One school principal shared:

> I love the whole conversation around the enablers and barriers. And the great thing was [staff] clearly owned [it], as in it was very transparent. People felt free to articulate what they felt barriers were.

Through a combination of our own project observations and the 2024 formative evaluation, we are learning that the process of systematically identifying and addressing enablers and barriers supports implementation in different ways. For example:

- Considering a range of enablers and barriers ensures important factors (e.g., barriers that could derail or detract from implementation efforts) are not overlooked.
  - For example, when staff in a Learning Partner school did not believe their school had a plan for implementing explicit instruction, this general belief was easily overcome by sharing the detailed implementation plan with staff and ensuring staff input was better captured in the plan.

- Acting on priority enablers and barriers supports the selection of more contextually appropriate implementation strategies, and, likely, more impactful ones.
  - For example, schools that identified large turnover in school staff as a barrier planned how they would repeat professional learning cycles with new staff.
- Identifying enablers and barriers supports reflections on implementation outcomes.
  - For example, data from the enablers and barriers activity allowed implementation teams to have more targeted conversations about the acceptability and feasibility of explicit instruction.
- Reflecting on enablers and barriers helps to steer future planning.
  - For example, implementation teams were able to reflect on which factors needed further attention and which could be leveraged to push ahead with implementation efforts in the next semester or year.

We are also learning that repeating enabler and barrier discussions at least twice a year, and, ideally, with the same staff, brings further value to the implementation process. Data from enabler and barrier identification activities provide a snapshot of factors at that point in time. Comparing data over time helps to identify any changes in barriers and enablers and shows whether efforts to address barriers and leverage enablers are working as intended. Positive changes in this respect (e.g., when a factor is no longer a barrier and may even have become an enabler) can demonstrate a collective will and capacity to respond to factors within a school's control that make implementation challenging. In turn, such positive changes can further build staff buy-in and potentially strengthen future implementation efforts.

Insight 5: A handful of well-chosen, carefully sequenced implementation strategies is worth more than a long list of strategies

Another component of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation involves carefully selecting implementation strategies. Schools in the Learning Partner project use implementation strategies, such as developing and revisiting an implementation plan, delivering professional learning cycles (which include knowledge-building sessions, unit/lesson planning support, modelling and coaching) and communicating commitment to the change.

We are learning that to use implementation strategies well, implementation teams should select a limited number of implementation strategies and focus on those most likely to be impactful, appropriate and feasible. While it is useful for implementation teams to think broadly and systematically about a range of implementation strategies (including ones they may not have used before), attempting to use many strategies simultaneously can be overwhelming, unnecessary or ineffective. For example, if an implementation team adds the strategy of identifying and preparing 'champions' to a long list of other strategies, champions may be selected based on one-off classroom observations that do not accurately indicate which teachers are ready to model an evidence-based teaching practice for their colleagues.

Using implementation strategies well also means combining and sequencing those strategies where relevant. The 2024 formative evaluation indicated that while school leaders valued each of the implementation strategies individually, the value of implementation strategies increased when multiple strategies were used together in a deliberate sequence. For example, one school principal reflected on the value of supplementing professional development (PD) (that is, knowledge-building sessions) with the strategies of modelling and coaching:

> [Modelling and coaching] was probably the biggest area that we were lacking across the school. We'd done the PD to death … But it wasn't until we started getting into the classrooms and doing the modelling and the coaching and the observations – that was really the turning point for us and our school.

Through our own observations, we also saw the value in supplementing the strategy of meeting regularly as an implementation team with the strategy of developing an implementation plan. Using the implementation plan as a live and shared document helped members of the implementation team apply the language and concepts of a deliberate and structured approach to implementation and ensured the plan responded to current concerns. Revisiting the plan in regular meetings also helped the implementation team to monitor progress and plan next steps.

Insight 6: The road to sustainability is paved with a deliberate and structured approach

Reaching sustainability – the point where the evidence-based teaching practice becomes 'the way we do things around here' – is the desired endpoint of an implementation effort. If the effective teaching practice is maintained with fidelity, many students can benefit from it. Yet, sustaining the changes brought about through an implementation process is known to be challenging (e.g., Aladjem et al., 2006; Herlitz et al., 2020; Shelton et al., 2018).

The 2024 formative evaluation indicated that while sustaining the changes brought about through an implementation process is indeed challenging,[6] there are some key enabling factors that positively influence the sustainability of both the implementation approach and the practice being implemented. These included:

- taking a reasonably paced approach to implementation (which usually involved going more slowly than school leaders would have anticipated, strategically using time and resources to support this slower pace, and frequently revisiting key concepts about the evidence-based teaching practice)

6 Based on what was appropriate and feasible for their school, in 2023, Cohort 1 school leaders either planned to scale up implementation (to a whole-school level or to include more groups of teachers) or to focus on sustaining the practice without scaling up. By the end of 2024, half of these Cohort 1 schools reported that they had met or exceeded their sustain and/or scale up goals, and half reported that they were not at their anticipated stage of implementation, usually due to the barriers of a change in leadership or competing priorities.

- having strong long-term support and enthusiasm from leadership
- continuing to invest in selected implementation strategies, especially classroom observations, modelling and coaching conversations and regular meetings of the school implementation team
- having tailored, light-touch support – for example, from an AERO Implementation Consultant in the second year of implementation.

Our project observations highlighted a further factor that encouraged sustainability – celebrating positive changes as they occurred. For example, celebrating the establishment of supportive coaching structures in a school, or perceived improvements in teacher practice and student outcomes, motivated staff to continue their implementation efforts.

Additionally, we are learning that effectively sustaining improvement requires early and careful planning to ensure enablers are in place. Leaders of schools that were new to the Learning Partner project in 2024 were confident that their schools could successfully sustain and scale up implementation of the practice in the following year, despite AERO reducing its level of support to 'light touch' at that time. Some of those leaders attributed this confidence to the fact they had approached the project with a sustainability mindset from the start. One school Implementation Coordinator reflected that:

> … with other things we've tried to implement [outside the Learning Partner project], we haven't discussed future and sustainability. So, [it's] been massive for us to be able to go, "Well, hang on a second. That won't work next year. What do we need to do to sustain this and make it work?"

How we're responding to our learning in 2025

Each iteration of the Learning Partner project is a response to earlier learning and insights. This section details how we have refined the project in 2025 based on learning to date.

Exploring levels of implementation support to implementation teams

- In 2025, we are working more closely with education systems and sectors to understand issues of scale and context. Specifically, we are investigating ways of supporting implementation in schools at scales similar to regional system groupings (i.e., with groups of 10 to 25 schools). This involves working alongside regional system teams to explore their role in supporting school implementation teams to implement well. We are also identifying types of support that regional system teams need from AERO.

Further tailoring to school context

- In 2025, we are partnering with a wider range of school communities – including secondary schools, regional schools and schools with even more diverse student populations – to strengthen our insights into tailoring implementation components across diverse contexts.
- At the same time, as we progress our work in the Learning Partner project, we aim to explore what options for adaptations can and should be made to an implementation process without compromising the key features of a deliberate and structured approach. In other words, we aim to provide more specific guidance on which aspects of implementation should and should not be tailored for context.

Further operationalising the 4 implementation components

- In March 2025, we published our first suite of practical resources for school leaders on implementation. These include resources for identifying and addressing implementation enablers and barriers, and for developing a school implementation plan. In doing so, we aim to provide all schools – not only Learning Partner project schools – with support to carry out these implementation activities.
- We continue to learn about the interconnections that exist between the 4 implementation components while also expanding on each individual component. In particular, we are investigating how to better support school implementation teams and regional system teams to monitor implementation outcomes.

Encouraging sustainability

- An ongoing focus for AERO is to pursue the most efficient and effective ways of implementing evidence-based teaching practices. We are also exploring the minimum level of support that most school leaders require (from AERO and from systems) to lead and sustain implementation processes well within their schools.

What's next in 2026 and beyond

Successful implementation of evidence-based teaching practices is critical for achieving sustained improvements in teaching practice, and there remains much to learn about implementation and how best to support it. To continue to strengthen our Learning Partner and other implementation work, our implementation focus in 2026 is likely to involve 3 different scales and levels of support. Specifically, we'll:

- continue to work with regional system teams to support and learn alongside groups of Learning Partner schools. This will be the second year in the Learning Partner project for those schools and regional system teams.
- investigate evidence-informed options for highly scalable forms of implementation support that AERO could potentially provide to implementation teams across Australian schools. We are seeking options that are less intensive than those provided through the Learning Partner project, but more intensive than disseminating implementation resources through AERO's website.
- publish further suites of practical guidance and resources on implementation for all school leaders – not only those who are part of the Learning Partner project.

We aim to share our insights on this work as we go.

References

Aladjem, D. K., LeFloch, K. C., Zhang, Y., Kurki, A., Boyle, A., Taylor, J. E., Herrmann, S., Uekawa, K., Thomsen, K., & Fashola, O. (2006). *Models matter: The final report of the National Longitudinal Evaluation of Comprehensive School Reform*. American Institutes for Research. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED499198

Australian Education Research Organisation. (2024). *Insights into implementation in 2024: What AERO is learning alongside schools about implementing evidence-based practices*. https://www.edresearch.edu.au/research/discussion-papers/insights-implementation-2024

Dagenais, C., Lysenko, L., Abramai, P. C., Bernard, R. M., Ramde, J., & Janosz, M. (2012). Use of research-based information by school practitioners and determinants of use: A review of empirical research. *Evidence & Policy*, *8*(3), 285–309. https://doi.org/10.1332/174426412X654031

Herlitz, L., MacIntyre, H., Osborn, T., & Bonell, C. (2020). The sustainability of public health interventions in schools: A systematic review. *Implementation Science*, *15*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-019-0961-8

Kirk, M. A., Kelley, C., Yankey, N., Birken, S. A., Abadie, B., & Damschroder, L. (2015). A systematic review of the use of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research. *Implementation Science*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-016-0437-z

Moore, D., Proctor, R., Benham-Clarke, S., Gains, H., Melendez-Torres, G. J., Axford, N., Rogers, M., Anderson, R., Hall, D., Hawkins, J., 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

National Implementation Research Network. (2015). *Implementation teams overview*. Retrieved June 17, 2025, from https://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/Implementation-Teams-Overview-M3.pdf

Shelton, R. C., Cooper, B. R., & Stirman, S. W. (2018). The sustainability of evidence-based interventions and practices in public health and health care. *Annual Review of Public Health*, *39*(1), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040617-014731

For more information visit
edresearch.edu.au

310725.CH.AA.V1