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Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development



Preview of the 2009 *Australian Early Development Index* results

Victoria's first steps



Every
child,
every
opportunity



**Published by the Communications Division
for Early Childhood Strategy Division
Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development**

Melbourne
October 2009

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and Early Childhood Development) 2009

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and Early Childhood Development,
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Introduction

The 2009 *AEDI National Report* provides summary data on Australian children. It reports on outcomes against five developmental domains:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills, and
- communication skills and general knowledge.

These domains are held against key variables, such as state/territory of residence, gender and Indigenous status. To achieve change at the local level, communities need reliable and comprehensive information about how they are faring.

In Victoria, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) provides community profiles for each local government area (LGA), based on 150 indicators that make up the Victorian Child and Adolescent Monitoring System. AEDI data and other survey results are included in these profiles.

National implementation of the AEDI presents a major opportunity for Victoria to build new data capability. This, in turn, supports early childhood services and social planners, school planners, local community partnerships and the broader public to understand:

- the multiple dimensions of early childhood development and the need for concerted community effort to support development in the years before school
- the geographic concentration and distribution of sub-optimal development
- implications for strengthening the community response.

The Victorian Government is committed to working with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and local communities to draw together relevant data and support them in identifying and responding to the needs of local children.



City of Greater Geelong

Putting children on the map

AEDI Participation – 2005

Number of primary schools: 57

Number of children: 2135

Number of teachers: 117

AEDI Results

Children vulnerable on one or more domains: 17.1%

Children on track on one or more domain: 72.9%



“The AEDI provided a catalyst for change – a bigger picture ... and opportunities.”

The AEDI results confirmed local knowledge and understanding in some communities and also identified unexpected outcomes in other communities.

Having the data unequivocally contributed to putting children on the social planning agenda.

The *AEDI Community Profiles* provided a strong foundation of support to build upon existing programs and initiatives.

Collecting AEDI data put the spotlight on the importance of investing in the early years and the data provided a strong evidence base informing Council’s social planning processes and priorities. It galvanised thinking and action, reinforcing Council’s commitment to make a difference to children’s outcomes by strengthening relationships with local organisations.

“The AEDI implementation was based on strong local partnerships and existing projects and programs.”

Council took responsibility to feed back the AEDI findings to their community partners and engaged with them to understand the AEDI community profiles so that they could work together to improve service planning and delivery.

“The AEDI data was used as a platform for developments across the whole municipality, along with three early childhood forums in the local areas of Portarlington, Corio-Norlane and East Geelong.”

The AEDI data complemented existing local information, which encouraged local engagement. Linkages between local government and primary schools were strengthened through the *Children’s Early Learning and Education Strategy Group* and the *Children’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group*. Other new strategies implemented included the *Bellarine Peninsula Strategy Plan*, the *Kids Go For Your Life* project, and *Let’s Read*. The *Geelong Children and Family’s Round Table* was established, followed by a *Regional literacy Planning and Library Plan*. Some of these strategies built on existing work. They also generated new energy and interest.

Greater Shepparton

Bringing the data together

AEDI Participation – 2008

Number of primary schools: 34

Number of children: 768

Number of teachers: 64

AEDI Results

Children vulnerable in one or more domains: 30.4%

Children on track on one or more domains: 60.1%



“The evidence base offers key activities, strategies and approaches that have a demonstrated record of success. Drawing on the evidence avoids ‘re-inventing the wheel’ and builds on past successes.”

Source: *Extension of Best Start Guidelines*, April 2006

Undertaking the AEDI was seen to be an appropriate action to progress the strategies contained in Action Area 7 of the *Greater Shepparton Best Start Municipal Early Years Plan Partnership – Research and Evaluation*. Council partnered with DEECD, the Sandhurst Diocese and the then Interim Community Planning Council to collect AEDI data from their school entrants.

The formation of an Evaluation and Data Subcommittee of the Partnership has provided a vehicle to promote community understanding of the AEDI findings and opportunities to understand what is happening at a local level with greater clarity.

“The AEDI data has provided a valuable platform for considering the implication of a broad range of early years data.”

The Greater Shepparton Municipal Early Years Plan Partnership sought more specific levels of data from the 2008 results, as it was agreed that the AEDI results could not be disseminated as a stand-alone resource.

It is clear that the AEDI results are one component of an effective place-based review of service development. Greater Shepparton will therefore disseminate AEDI results as part of a detailed local data set, with additional and complementary data to support local action.

“A particular focus has been given to promoting understanding of the online maps.”

Community demographics indicated the value of separating results. A particular critical concern was the limited utility of a data set for a local profile that included only 500 children, which did not reflect the large size of the Shepparton locality .

AEDI data has been utilised to highlight the developmental vulnerability of Aboriginal children across all five domains of the AEDI, as measured in the first year of school, in *Closing the Gap: Shepparton: A Draft Indicator Set of Aboriginal Wellbeing for Greater Shepparton*, published by the Kaiela Planning Council (formerly the Community Planning Council) in July 2009.

Broadmeadows/Hume

Mobilising partnerships

AEDI Participation – 2008

Number of primary schools: 45

Number of children: 2508

Number of teachers: 134

AEDI Results

Children vulnerable in one or more domains: 53.6%

Children on track on one or more domains: 37.7%



“Collaboration between agencies is critical to achieving a more integrated service system.”

In Hume, 38 per cent of people were born overseas, 128 different languages are spoken, and kindergarten enrolments are lower in this municipality than in the rest of Victoria.

The Broadmeadows area is characterised by significant socioeconomic disadvantage, and the AEDI shows that a significant proportion of children beginning school are vulnerable on one or more of the five developmental domains.

The Hume Early Years Partnership, established in 2002, has a critical coordinating role in responding to any emerging issues in the early years service system that impact on school readiness.

“The AEDI data over time helps to establish patterns and emerging themes relating to school readiness.”

The AEDI results reinforced the need for preschool services to clearly articulate an approach that would assist in meeting children’s developmental needs. The findings created a strong incentive for school readiness strategies within the Broadmeadows area, as vulnerabilities were identified in the areas of language and cognitive skills, communication and general knowledge.

“The AEDI results confirmed anecdotal comments of local teachers.”

The AEDI results helped to identify the need to provide additional support to parents (to supplement individual programs or services). Using these results with available evidence from the Best Start and Communities for Children initiatives has encouraged progress towards improving participation in Early Childhood Education and Care programs prior to school entry.

Given that many children in Broadmeadows are considered developmentally vulnerable upon entry to school, the Hume City Council now has an Early Years Framework as part of its preschool system.

“Partnerships with strong coordination lead to improved outcomes for children.”

Mornington Peninsula

Reshaping services

AEDI Participation – 2005

Number of primary schools: 31

Number of children: 147

Number of teachers: 72

AEDI Results

Children vulnerable on one or more domains: 17.5%

Children on track on one or more domains: 71.4%



“The AEDI results helped us focus our effort ... attracting new resources and maximising existing resources.”

Prior to the implementation of the AEDI in 2005, data across the Mornington Peninsula (predominately at LGA level) provided a picture indicating that, overall, children were on track. What was determined through the AEDI results was that there were higher levels of developmental vulnerability in two local communities than previously thought.

The AEDI results supported a greater focus on early years planning in Hastings and Rosebud West. In Hastings, strategies to improve outcomes for children included the redevelopment of an existing child and family centre – the Wallaroo Child and Family Centre – to provide a range of early childhood and community services.

In Rosebud West, the results supported the development of a Rosebud West Early Years Project, which included the introduction of the *Let’s Read* initiative, supported play groups and additional parent engagement strategies.

Since the release of the 2005 AEDI results, most major funding applications include a detailed section showing local community results, together with birth rates, location of children and families, ethnicity, Aboriginality, socio-demographic profiling and measures of disadvantage. Additional narrative explains how the evidence has been used to mobilise local communities to improve outcomes for children and families.

Mapping data has assisted in identifying community cohorts against those risk factors that are known to be associated with poor outcomes. Mapping has also provided important information about where the greatest areas of need for support and services may lie.

“Presenting the results in domains rather than service or systems areas raised the level of understanding, rejuvenating a shared commitment for the local network group.”

With a focus on long-term ‘improved health and development outcomes for children and young people’ came increased community awareness about the early years.

“The shared language of developmental domains encouraged discussion between early childhood services, schools and service systems.”

Early years services, schools, parents and the broader community now talk in terms of developmental domains and children being on track.