

Variations in schools' readiness for change

Learnings from the Getting it Right from the Start project

June 2023



This snapshot explores variations in schools' readiness to implement a response to intervention (RTI) approach to improving children's oral language and reading skills. It is a collaboration between the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) and the Centre for Community and Child Health at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and forms part of the Getting it Right from the Start project.

About the Australian Education Research Organisation

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) is Australia's national education evidence body, working towards excellent and equitable outcomes for all children and young people.

For more information visit edresearch.edu.au

About the Centre for Community Child Health

The Centre for Community Child Health is a department of The Royal Children's Hospital and research group of Murdoch Children's Research Institute. The Centre contributes to improving the health and wellbeing of children by identifying, synthesising and translating the best evidence to inform policy, service delivery, practice and parenting.

For more information visit rch.org.au/ccch/

Acknowledgements

AERO acknowledges that this publication was made possible by the joint funding it receives from Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

Acknowledgement of Country

AERO acknowledges the traditional 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.

Authors

Kate Scott, Associate Professor Jon Quach, Dr Georgia Dawson, Professor Sharon Goldfeld

Copyright

All material presented in this publication is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), 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

Scott, K., Quach, J., Dawson, G., & Goldfeld, S. (2023). *Variations in schools' readiness for change: Learnings from the Getting it Right from the Start project*. Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO). <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/readiness-change-education>

Publication details

ISBN 978-1-923066-00-7 (Online)

Cover image: AERO

Contents

List of abbreviations	4
Background	5
Key findings	7
Development of a readiness profile for each Cohort 1 school	7
Identified barriers for change in Cohort 1 schools	8
Learnings and recommendations	10
Next steps	10
References	10

List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full text
MCRI	Murdoch Children's Research Institute
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
SES	Socio-economic status
GIRFTS	Getting it Right from the Start
RTI	Response to intervention

Background

Educational attainment is recognised as the most influential social determinant of lifelong physical and mental health, and school engagement predicts later social, emotional and economic wellbeing. However, even at the start of primary school, there are significant inequities in health and development. The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), a nationwide measure of early childhood development completed by teachers on all children at school entry, has shown significant socio-economic status (SES)-based disparities across all key areas of early childhood development. Specifically, the AEDC 2021 results clearly show that children in areas of greatest SES disadvantage have the highest rates of developmental vulnerability in the language and cognitive domains compared to those in the most advantaged areas. These recognised inequities are also reflected in later schooling and do not resolve but increase over time (Goss et al., 2016; Mullis et al., 2017).

The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019) emphasises the need for education to be equitable. The use of a response to intervention (RTI) framework can help schools support as many students as possible in the classroom through high-quality evidence-based instruction. This is in addition to identifying and subsequently providing increasing and more intensive support at different 'tiers' for children who are at risk of developing learning difficulties. RTI is a conceptual framework centred around using student outcome data and a problem-solving process to drive decisions around classroom instruction and support (RTI Action Network, n.d.).

Getting it Right from the Start (GIRFTS) aims to evaluate whether a specifically designed RTI approach for oral language and reading instruction targeted to the early years of school can improve children's language and reading when compared with usual teaching practice by the beginning of Grade 2. Acknowledging that learning challenges persist – or increase – over time, the goal is to address the needs of children at risk of learning difficulties early so that we can be 'getting it right from the start'.

In addition to measuring student outcomes in oral language and literacy in Grade 2, GIRFTS will also undertake a comprehensive implementation and process evaluation to examine the effectiveness and fidelity of RTI implementation within schools, and the barriers and enablers of implementation that impact on its success. This includes an examination of schools' **readiness for change** and its impact on implementation and student outcomes. While our findings focus on the RTI framework, they also have relevance to the greater knowledge base related to implementation science in an education setting.

Readiness for change

Readiness for change is the developmental process by which an organisation increases its *capacity* and *willingness* to engage in a new activity (Peterson, 2013). A high level of readiness for change has long been theorised by implementation practitioners and scholars across multiple disciplines as a critical component of implementation success. Researchers speculate that developing a better understanding of the factors that influence organisational readiness for change is vital if we want to better understand implementation variability, as well as for enhancing the scale up of interventions as they move into new settings and contexts.

With the aim of better understanding variations in schools' readiness to implement RTI, a measure of organisational readiness for change was included in the 2022 baseline School Staff Training Survey as part of the GIRFTS project. This survey was only distributed to schools implementing RTI in 2022. These schools are known as Cohort 1.

A scoping review was conducted focusing on readiness for change instruments that had been used in educational settings. Forty-seven articles were included in the review, but a fit for purpose instrument was not discovered. Instead, using the constructs and items identified in the review as most likely to influence school staff readiness for change, a measure consisting of 22 items across 10 constructs was designed. The 10 included constructs are: Buy-in, Peer support, Leadership support, Perception of need, Tolerable stress levels, Tolerable workload levels, Openness to change, Resources, Tolerable effort and Self-efficacy. Table 1 provides a definition of each of the constructs.

Table 1: Definitions of the 10 constructs included in the baseline readiness for change measure

Construct	Definition
Buy-in	A belief that the program addresses a need for students and is an improvement on current practice.
Peer support	When individuals at the same level within a school provide each other with knowledge, resources, experience, emotional, social and/or practical help to implement the program.
Leadership support	When leaders within a school provide their staff with knowledge, resources, experience, emotional, social and/or practical help to implement the program.
Perception of need	An individual's belief that the program is desirable and/or useful for the school community.
Tolerable stress level	An emotional and physical response that an individual feels when they experience something new, unexpected or when they feel they have little control over a situation.
Tolerable workload level	An individual's perception of the amount of work that is expected or that they have been assigned.
Self-efficacy	An individual's belief in their ability to perform a set of behaviours to produce a specified outcome.
Resources	An individual's perception that they have access to staff and/or materials to implement the program.
Openness to change	An individual's willingness to alter a current behaviour or belief.
Tolerable effort level	An individual's perception of the amount of effort they will be required to expend to produce a specified outcome.

The 22 items were scored on a 6-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) with a seventh option 'I don't know' also included.

For each school, a score for each item was determined with Strongly Agree scored as 6, Strongly Disagree as 1 and 'I don't know' as 0. As per the measure's protocol, 3 items were reverse scored. To determine the score for each readiness for change construct, the score of each item or items within the construct was averaged by the number of survey respondents at each school (including 'I don't know' responses).

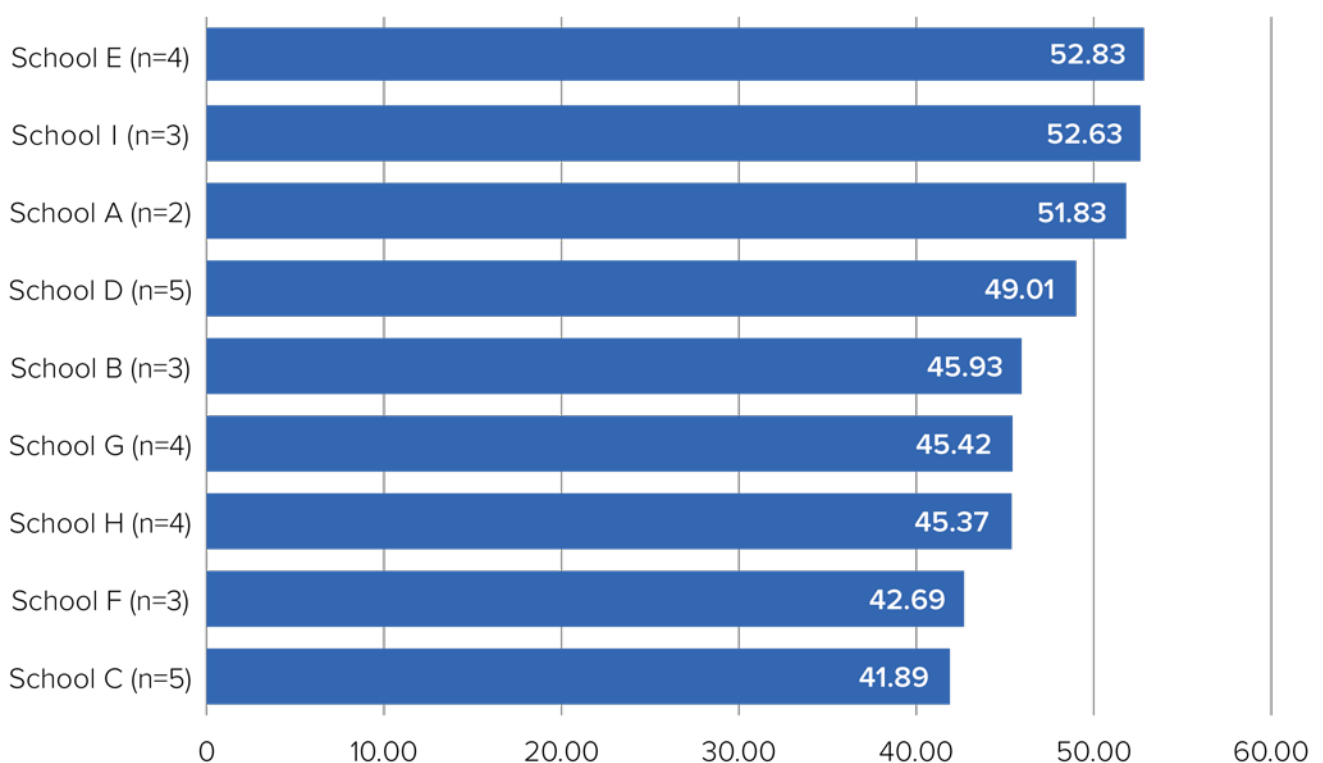
Key findings

A total of 32 school staff from the 9 Cohort 1 schools completed the readiness for change items included in the baseline 2022 Staff Training Survey.

Development of a readiness profile for each Cohort 1 school

Each school's baseline readiness for change data was analysed to determine the school's readiness profile. The readiness profile for each Cohort 1 school is the sum of the average of the 10 readiness for change constructs for the individual school. The higher the readiness profile score, the more likely the school is to be ready for change, with the highest possible score being 60. Figure 1 shows the readiness profiles in ranked order.

Figure 1: Ranked readiness profiles of Cohort 1 schools



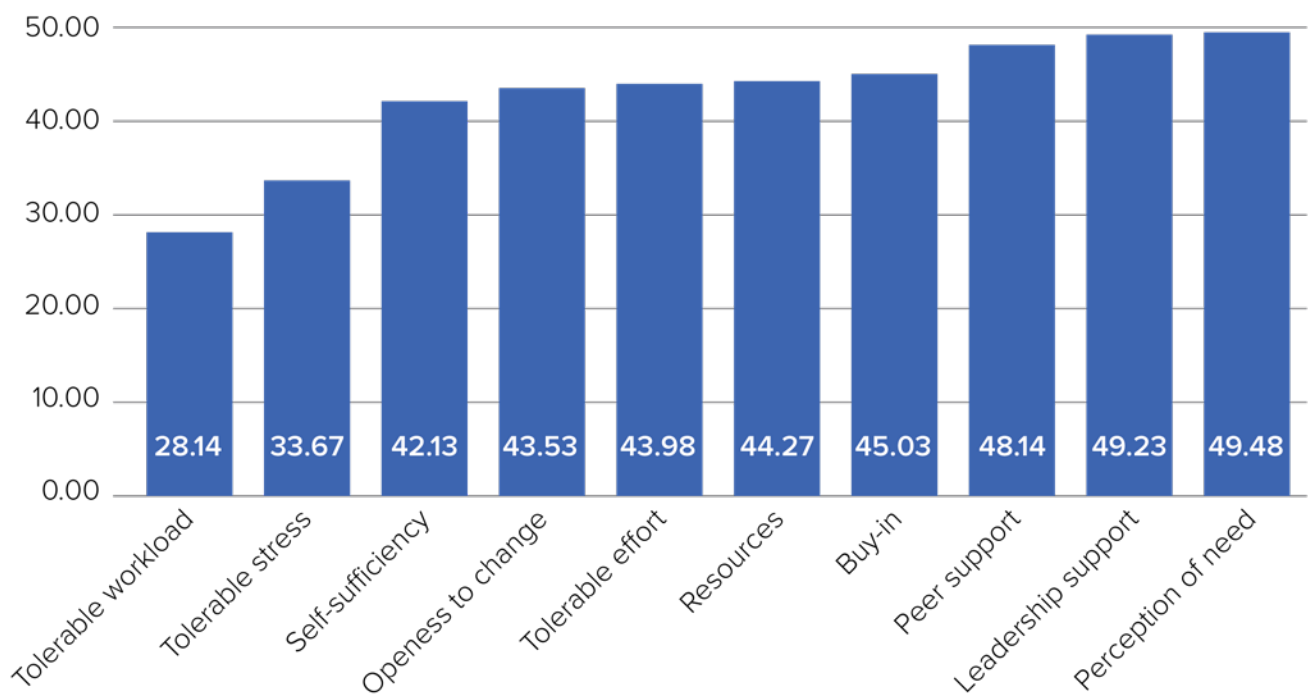
As [Figure 1](#) indicates, School E has the highest readiness profile, while School C has the lowest readiness profile. This suggests that School E is more ready to implement the GIRFTS intervention than School C and is therefore likely to experience fewer barriers to implementation than School C. However, further research is planned to determine if this baseline prediction is accurate and if the variations in the baseline readiness profiles are significant – i.e., if the 7.41-point difference between School E and School G translates into a measurable difference in implementation success (See [Next steps](#) for further details).

Identified barriers for change in Cohort 1 schools

The baseline readiness for change data were further analysed to determine the barriers to change experienced across the Cohort 1 schools. Each barrier to change is the sum of the average of each individual school's score for each of the 10 readiness for change constructs. The results of this analysis, as shown in [Figures 2 and 3](#), indicate that inaccuracies will occur if data from multiple schools are combined to predict the relative order of barriers to change at the school level.

Figure 2 ranks the barriers to change across the Cohort 1 schools, with the total average score of each of the 10 readiness for change constructs summed and ordered. A lower score indicates a lower level of readiness for change being reported by the schools, and hence is considered a higher barrier for change. Figure 2 predicts that 2 constructs – Tolerable workload and Tolerable stress – are likely to be the most significant barriers that Cohort 1 schools will face in supporting their staff to increase their readiness for change, with both constructs scoring significantly lower scores than the remaining 8 constructs. In contrast, there is only a 7-point difference between the predicted third-highest barrier – Self-efficacy – and the lowest barrier – Perception of need.

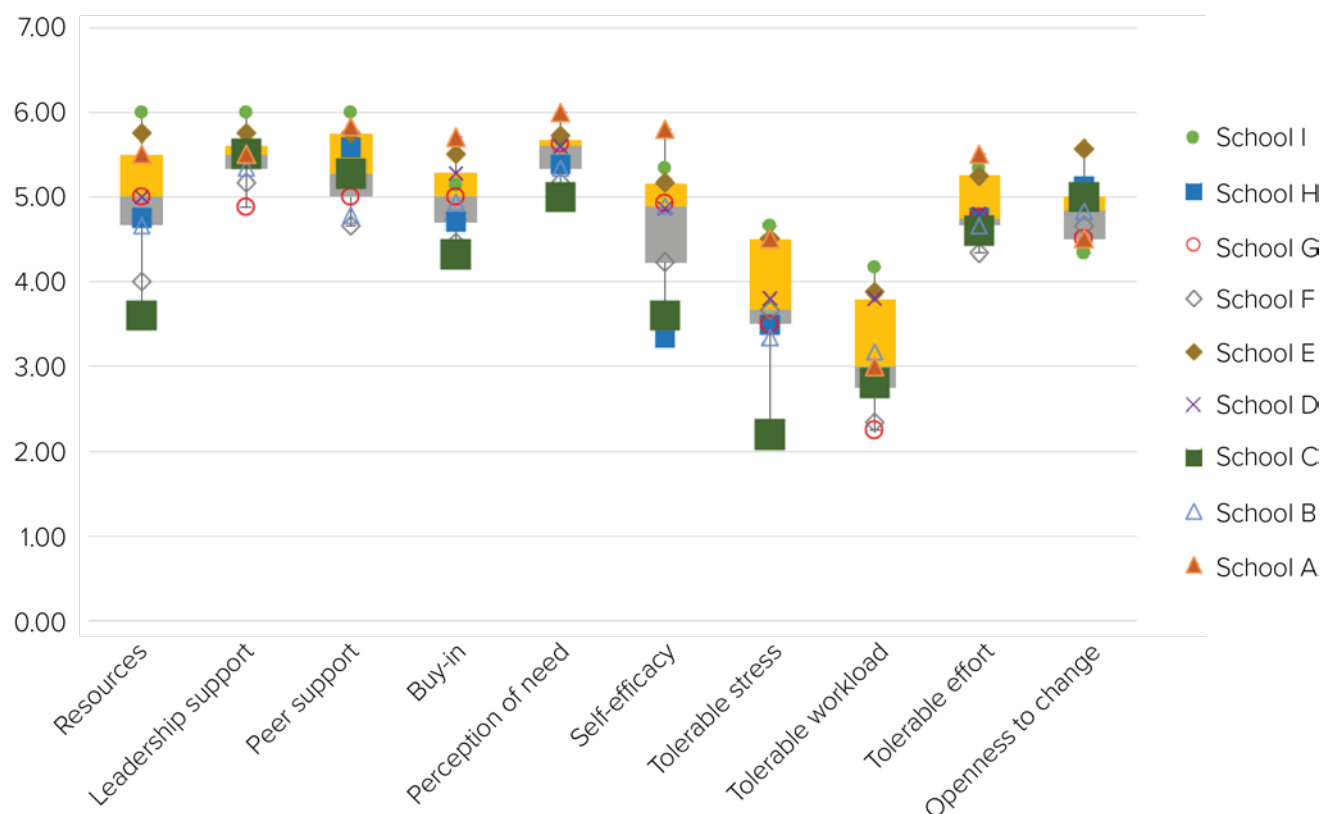
Figure 2: Ranked barriers to change across Cohort 1 schools



Comparing [Figure 2](#) to [Figure 3](#) demonstrates the importance of using school-specific data to identify barriers to change within each school. [Figure 3](#) provides a box and whisker representation of the 10 readiness for change constructs, overlaid with the result for each individual school plotted against the graph. Construct scores for School C – the school with the lowest readiness profile – are highlighted in [Figure 3](#) as the dark green square.

[Figure 3](#) demonstrates that it is preferable to review each school's barriers to change using their individual data rather than using overall cohort data to predict barriers for change within a school. Focusing on School C as an example, Tolerable stress and Tolerable workload are ranked as the 2 highest barriers to change. This is a similar trend shown by the overall cohort data in [Figure 2](#), although appearing in reverse predicted order. However, Resources is ranked as the third highest barrier to change for School C, but it is ranked as the sixth highest barrier to change in the cohort level data. Additionally, School C ranks Perception of need as the equal seventh barrier (out of 10) within their school, but this construct is shown as the lowest barrier when data from all schools are combined. These results for School C are not isolated, with other schools' barriers to change order also deviating from the overall Cohort 1 barriers to change analysis. This suggests that overall cohort data should not be used to predict a school's barriers to change, but that school level data should be utilised.

Figure 3: Distribution of the readiness for change construct scores for each Cohort 1 school



Learnings and recommendations

Reflecting on the data presented in this report, it is recommended that to increase the likelihood of GIRFTS implementation success, all Cohort 1 schools focus on:

- ways they can support staff to reduce their stress levels
- ways they can support staff to reduce their workload.

Additionally, [Figures 2](#) and [3](#) emphasise the importance of schools reviewing their own readiness for change data to overcome the specific barriers their school community faces in implementing GIRFTS.

Next steps

The following readiness for change research questions will be examined by the GIRFTS research team over the coming months:

1. Is there a difference in a school's readiness profile after 6 months of GIRFTS implementation?
2. Are the items in the current readiness for change measures fit for purpose?
3. Does providing schools with access to their readiness to change data improve the school's readiness for change?
4. Do the baseline readiness profiles align with the implementation experiences of schools and implementation support partners?

References

Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2019). *The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) education declaration*. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration/resources/alice-springs-mparntwe-education-declaration>

Goss, P., Sonnermann, J., Chisholm, C., & Nelson, L. (2016.) *Widening gaps: What NAPLAN tells us about student progress*. Grattan Institute. <https://grattan.edu.au/report/widening-gaps/>

Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Hooper, M. (2017). *PIRLS 2016 International results in reading*. International Associate for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

Peterson, S. M. (2013). Readiness to change: Effective implementation processes for meeting people where they are. In T. Halle, A. Metz, & I. Martinez-Beck (Eds.), *Applying implementation science to early childhood programs and systems*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

RTI Action Network. (n.d.). *What is RTI?* <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>



For more information visit edresearch.edu.au or mcri.edu.au