Using data for insight and impact

The Data Driven Districts Initiative: NASCEE Regional Events March to May 2025

Accurate data is critical for efficient planning and evidence-based decision making in education: for system-level policy makers and officials, for school leaders and for classroom educators. NASCEE partners with the New Leaders Foundation (NLF) and the Department of Education (DBE) to share information about the Data Driven Districts (DDD) Dashboard. The Dashboard provides real-time, visualised learner data from SA-SAMS and was featured in four recent NASCEE regional events (in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu Natal and Cape Town), giving stakeholders opportunities to reflect on how data can improve their own interventions as well as foster stronger partnerships with government and across the sector.

Mapping the sector for evidence-based educational strategies

Working with DBE and other partners, NASCEE is currently mapping the work of the NGO education sector, filtering for geographical areas and school locations as well as programme focus areas. The map has a range of use cases. It will help districts plan their own improvement strategies, identify public-private partnerships, and prevent duplication of projects. Funders can see where support is needed, helping them hone their investment priorities and distribution decisions. NGOs can identify collaborative synergies with others working in their areas, as well as gain greater access to government in order to support their funded interventions. Finally, mapping data is a major source of evidence-based research for all stakeholders. We invite all NGOs interested in appearing on the NASCEE Map to contact NASCEE.

The DDD Dashboard: Actionable insights to drive improvement

> 'Previously, slow data collection and synthesis hindered timely decision-making. But now leaders, officials, principals and educators can make real-time decisions on a range of issues, from policies to learning goals.'
> (Khodani Makatu, NLF)

The New Leaders Foundation (NLF) DDD Dashboard programme was launched in 2014 in partnership with the Department of Basic Education. Ongoing implementation is informed by lessons learned, including:

- **Local and district-level champions** are more effective than provincial ones.
- **Training** boosts usage, but uptake must be systematically measured.
- **Support** is needed to turn data insights into action.
- **Key enablers** include capacity-building in data management, and stronger data governance to enhance accountability, quality, and access control.

Examples of how DDD data has supported provincial priorities include its use in departmental mentorship programmes targeting underperforming districts. DDD's predictive analytics functionality also helps identify learners at risk of failing, enabling early, targeted interventions. This offers significant value in shaping both departmental and NGO responses to better support at-risk learners.

See the [Data-Driven Districts](#) (DDD) initiative and [New Leaders Foundation presentation](#) here, including illustrative use cases. A demo dashboard can be viewed [here](#).)

Discussion Highlights

Questions, experiences and comments from the floor at all regional events highlighted the many applications of data in improving planning, implementation and programme review. Here is a sample of points made.

Access to school-based data
NGOs can request DDD data through districts or school principals, provided it's anonymised. Clear policies for data sharing are needed, and the DBE is addressing this in a draft digital strategy aligned with POPIA.

Sharing data strengthens school-based NGO programmes
Accessible data helps users make connections between categories of data, enabling local officials, school personnel and NGO implementers see the links between cause and effect. This shows where programme adaptations are needed and improves sustainable change post-project. Regular data also helps NGOs monitor progress, measure their programme impact and contribute to research in the sector.

Interoperability
Integrating platforms such as E Cares for ECD, and sharing data across agencies, will support a "cradle to career" approach. Migration of SA-SAMS to the cloud is under review, pending policy and funding considerations.

Expanding data use
- Data can highlight areas where teachers from different schools can collaborate through Professional Learning Communities.
- Data helps identify areas where support is needed, but also and areas for possible extension programmes to nurture talent.
- If learner data shows regular absenteeism, or the need (for example) for psychosocial support, mapping of NGO services can help direct schools and districts to an appropriate provider.

> 'Data tells me where I am and what I need to look at going forward. I can see trends across terms, see which subjects need strengthening, and I can compare things like attendance in relation to performance for individual learners.
> Numbers talk – know your learners.'
> (Maesela Madisho, Principal of the Khutlo-Tharo Performing and Creative Arts

Good quality data speaks to everyone, and helps illuminate possible areas of collaboration for effective education. To truly unlock the potential of education data, we must commit to a culture of purposeful collection, rigorous analysis, and open sharing—ensuring every data point drives better decisions and stronger outcomes for all learners.

NASCEE would like to thank its government partners, all presenters and participants who attended its regional events in Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and Cape Town as well as those organisations that hosted the four events.