

From Insight to Impact: Reimagining Evaluation for Real-World Change

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A recent example of real-world policymaking

Promoting Attendance and Participation for Secondary School Students

Student attendance in school is lower than pre-pandemic levels and research shows this has a negative impact on student achievement. Attendance and participation in class are currently not required elements of final course marks.

To encourage improved engagement, Ontario would enable policy to make participation and attendance worth 15 per cent of the final course mark for Grades 9 to 10 and 10 per cent for Grades 11 to 12. Students would not be negatively impacted for excused absences, such as illnesses and holy days.

Queen's Park | News Service

Ontario to make attendance count for up to 15 per cent of high school final grades

By [The Canadian Press](#)

Updated: April 14, 2026 at 5:26PM EDT

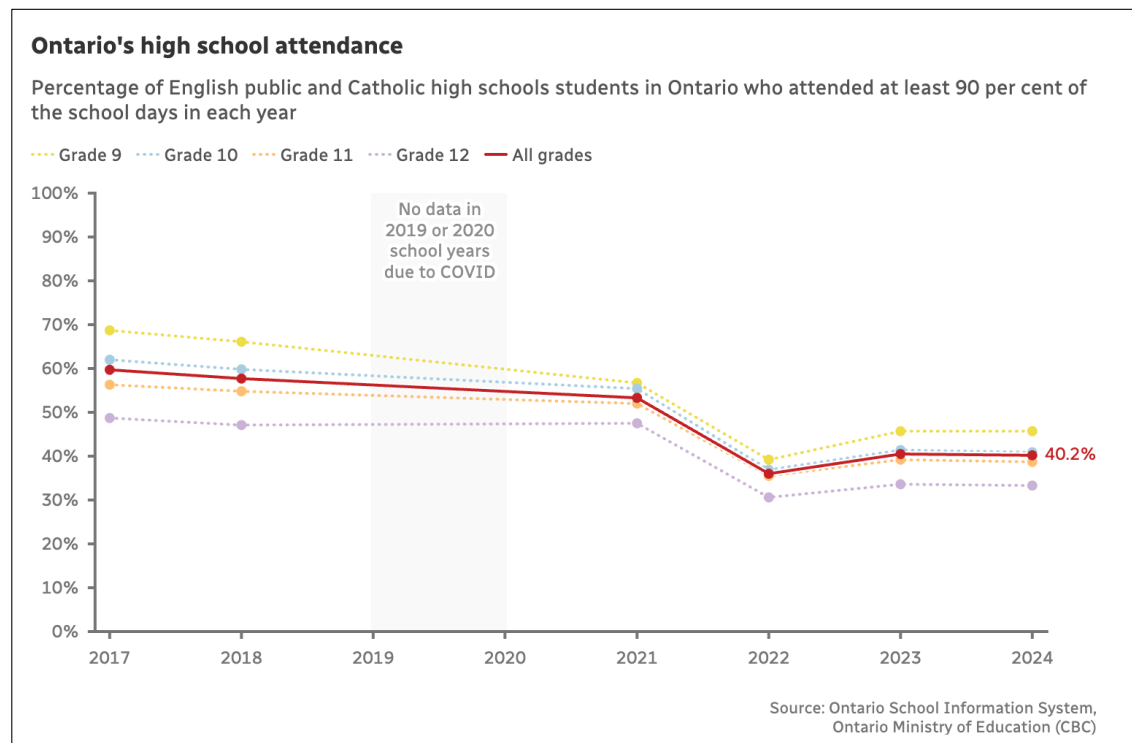
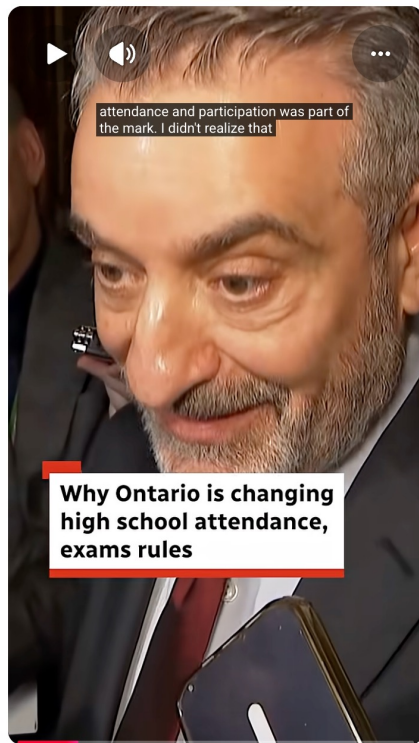
Published: April 14, 2026 at 3:00PM EDT

Ontario Education Minister Paul Calandra explains the tabled bill that would see sweeping changes to the education system.

EDUCATION

Ontario will give marks for attending class in move minister says came from teachers

Evidence supporting the policy change



Mixed reactions to the policy change

Toronto

Ontario plans to tie high school attendance to grades and mandate final exams. It's getting mixed reactions

Measures are symbolic, 'without actually doing things that are going to address the problems,' researcher says



[Jessica Wong](#) · CBC News · Posted: Apr 15, 2026 4:00 AM EDT | Last Updated: April 15

NEWS

Tying attendance to final marks in Ontario high schools won't solve chronic absenteeism. Here's why students are staying home

Ontario's Putting Student Achievement First Act aims to combat chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10 per cent (18+ days) of the school year, which has risen significantly since 2017.



By [Janis Ramsay](#) Insidehalton.com

Wednesday, April 22, 2026 | 4 min to read

Using evidence and evaluation to strengthen policymaking

- What is evidence-informed policymaking?
- What are the current challenges in EIPM? How can we use evidence and evaluation to influence policy change?
- What have we learned from evaluation capacity building?
- How does ECB support evidence-informed policymaking by building evaluation cultures?

Evidence-Informed Policymaking

“ Evidence-informed policy making can be defined as a process whereby multiple sources of information, including statistics, data and including the best available research evidence and **evaluations**, are consulted before making a decision to plan, implement, and (where relevant) alter public policies, programs and delivery quality public other services. ”


(OECD, 2020, p.12)



What do we consider to be evidence?

“statistics, data and...the best available research evidence and **evaluations**”

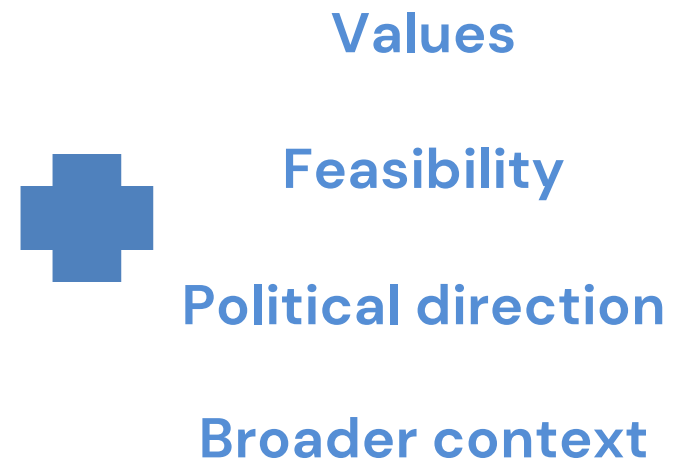
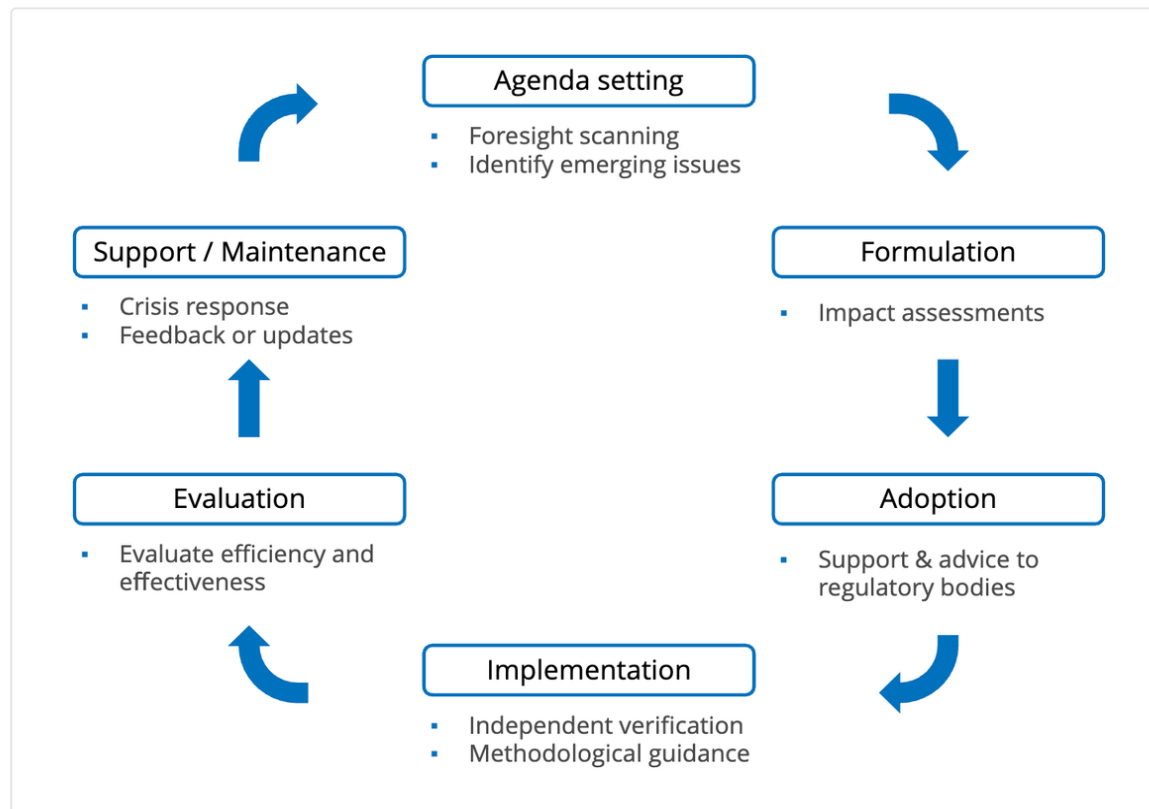
(OECD)



Scientific and/or research evidence, often produced in specific ways

General knowledge or information produced through research, **evaluation**, data, expertise, and citizen feedback

Evidence can support all stages of the policy process, not just the evaluation stage



[Cairney, 2013](#)

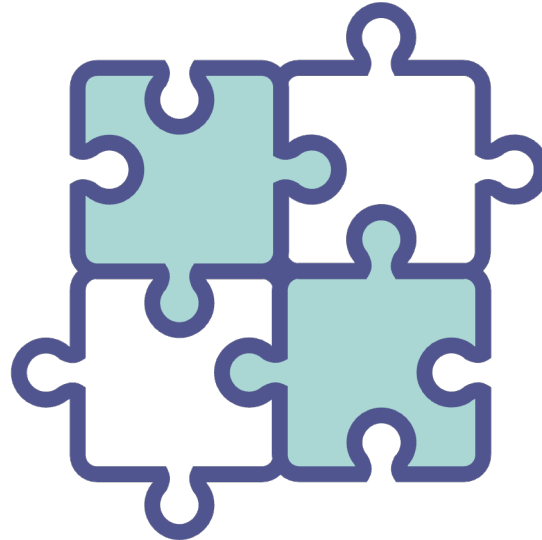
How does evidence support the policy cycle?

Assess needs and context

Counter political pressures, trends or fads by providing context and a more complete view of an issue

Improve foresight and planning

Identify policy outcomes or effects that might be substantial if applied at scale



Support decision-making

Inform government about the effectiveness of policy instruments and measures and support allocation of public funds

Enhance democratic systems

Enhance transparency and accountability of governments to ensure more democratic systems

Demand Side: Policymakers

Individual challenges or barriers to evidence use



Lack of time and/or resources to seek out and review evidence



Personal values and beliefs about the utility of evidence or its applicability to political realities



Limited access to scientific research and/or evidence



Information or evidence overload



Lack of competencies/ experience related to research methods and on integrating evidence in policymaking



Conflict between evidence and policymaker beliefs or ideology

Organizational challenges or barriers to evidence use



Lack of structures and systems that support evidence use throughout the policy cycle



Insufficient policy staff responsible for assessing and integrating evidence



Poor managerial or leadership support



Unclear decision-making processes



Limited structured engagement between evidence producers and policymakers



Competing values within the organization that cause "policy paralysis"

Characteristics of the policymaking process that hinder evidence use

- Political nature of the process can result in selective or symbolic uses of evidence
- Process often requires negotiation or compromises that are not based on evidence
- Evidence does not provide clear-cut or unidimensional answers to complex policy questions
- Evidence production timelines do not align with policymaking
- Policy actors work in silos depending on the step of the cycle

**Supply Side:
Evidence Producers**



The Two-Community Theory: Myth or Reality?

Theory: evidence producers and evidence users have different training, priorities, and goals

This has been dispelled through research on evidence use

However, bridging the two communities requires capacity building on both sides and the development of relationships through collaboration

This requires leadership and policy champions in evidence-producing and government organizations

Producing useful evidence



Reliable, transparent, methodologically sound evidence production processes



Adapting evidence to policymaker needs and using quality communications mechanisms



Engagement of interest holders and communities to foster mutual understanding through the evidence production process

Bridging the gap: evaluation to action

Building evaluation cultures to support EIPM

Evaluation Capacity Building:

“...the intentional work to continuously create and sustain overall organizational processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine”

Stockdill, Baizerman, & Compton, 2002 (p. 14)

Building policy analytical capacity in individuals: learning from ECB



Individual evaluation capacity building

Focuses on strengthening individual evaluation competencies to conduct and/or use evaluations, through training (direct) or experiential learning (indirect)

This requires enhanced individual training in evaluation design, conduct, and utilization



Policy analytical capacity

Refers to key actors in the policy process and their ability to produce evidence AND capacity to use evidence

This requires enhanced individual training in data collection, knowledge mobilization and policy design

Strengthening organizational systems and structures: learning from ECB



Organizational evaluation capacity building

Focuses on strengthening the systems and structures that support the production and use of evaluations

This can include data repositories, decision-making pathways, evaluation policies, formal relationships between units, etc.



Organizational policy capacity

Focuses on strengthening the systems and structures that support the design and implementation of evidence-based policies

This can include formal relationships with researchers, evidence repositories, connections between policy actors, formal evidence integration processes, etc.

Building evidence and evaluation cultures in organizations



- University-based evaluation capacity building initiative for community-based organizations
- Uses direct and indirect ECB: organizational representatives
- Intent is to support organizational ECB over time by sharing with other organizational members and continued evaluation practice

(Bourgeois & Buetti, 2024)

- Action research project involving 32 public health units across Ontario
- Evaluation capacity assessment process
- Specific ECB strategies designed and implemented in 10 public health units, based on their needs and vision
- Included direct, indirect, and organizational ECB activities

(Bourgeois & Buetti, 2018)

Examples of evidence use in the Canadian federal government

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Qualitative documentation of the experiences of residential school Survivors, their families, and their communities to inform federal policies, programs, and actions (e.g., legislative changes, program investments)
- Covid-19 response: Crisis context meant that “traditional” evidence sources were unavailable; officials used observational studies, predictive models, preprints, expert opinions and community-generated data to inform ongoing guidance and public health measures ([Cotton et al., 2025](#))

What does the evidence actually tell us?

Promoting Attendance and Participation for Secondary School Students	Student attendance in school is lower than pre-pandemic levels and research shows this has a negative impact on student achievement. Attendance and participation in class are currently not required elements of final course marks.	To encourage improved engagement, Ontario would enable policy to make participation and attendance worth 15 per cent of the final course mark for Grades 9 to 10 and 10 per cent for Grades 11 to 12. Students would not be negatively impacted for excused absences, such as illnesses and holy days.
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Abstenteeism is complex and can be due to mental health challenges, poverty, home-based violence, bullying, chronic illnesses, previous involvement in justice system.






“Understanding the underlying mechanisms contributing to chronic absenteeism can provide meaningful guidance on how to develop effective interventions designed to address these concerns.” (Eklund et al., 2022)



Compulsory school attendance policies have **little to no impact** on school attendance (Conry & Richards, 2018; Kim & Joo, 2011)

Various interventions should be used to promote attendance based on student needs (Crowder & Searle, 2025), including mentoring programs, direct instruction to enhance coping skills, interventions targeting family members, etc. (Eklund et al., 2022)

Reimagining evaluation for real-world change

-  Transform research and evaluation evidence into actionable policy briefs or data summaries in your organizations
-  Ask questions to promote evaluative thinking
-  Leverage opportunities for co-creation that bring together evaluators and policymakers
-  Develop evaluation capacity building strategies
-  Become an advocate within your personal sphere

Thank you !

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