

# KNOWLEDGE NETWORK FOR APPLIED EDUCATION RESEARCH

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## OVERVIEW

The Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research (KNAER) was established in October 2010 as a collaborative partnership among the Ontario Ministry of Education, the University of Toronto and the University of Western Ontario (now Western University Canada) to support the ministry's commitment to develop and implement policies, programs, and practices that are evidence-based, research-informed, and connected to provincial education goals.

The specific role of the KNAER is to mobilize evidence of effective school and classroom practices across Ontario to improve education policy and practice to benefit student outcomes. By funding a variety of knowledge mobilization projects, the KNAER facilitates networks of policy makers, educators and researchers working collaboratively to apply research to practice, to broker new and existing knowledge, and to connect with other national and international networks. This is a rare example of significant collaborative effort to strengthen the connection of research to practice.

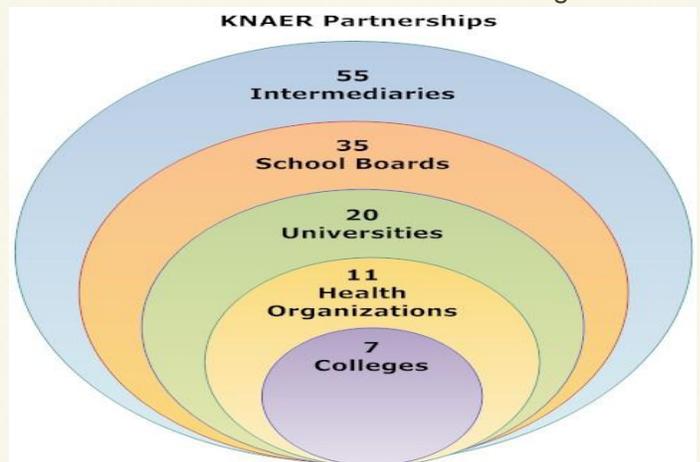
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## WHAT IS THE PROJECT ABOUT?

Starting in January 2011, organizations across Ontario were eligible to apply for funding in four categories:

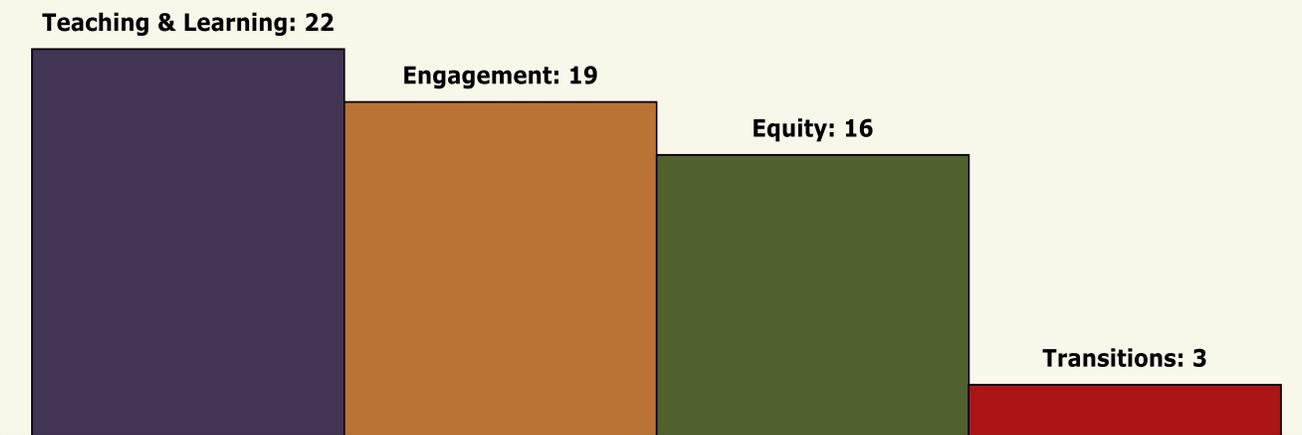
- exploiting current research more effectively;
- building or extending networks for further priority areas;
- strengthening research brokering; and
- visits by leading world researchers.

Projects had to focus on four priority themes identified by the ministry: engagement, equity, teaching & learning, and transitions. The response from the sector was swift and enthusiastic. In the first nine months, 44 projects were approved that involve diverse partnerships of over 120 organizations across the sector, totalling more than \$2 million of funding. These projects represent partnerships across the province among school districts, professional organizations, universities, colleges, and other intermediaries including parent councils and health sector organizations.



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## Approved KNAER Projects by Priority Theme



### CRITICAL FINDINGS

Conditions for successful partnerships identified in the research literature (Nutley et al, 2008, 140; Goering et al., 2003) include: resources dedicated to the project; understanding and appreciation of differing cultures involved; clear definitions and roles; and trust among different partners involved. Effective connections between research and practice require attention to supporting processes of capacity building, communication and collaboration among researchers, policy makers and educators. While findings are preliminary, results from this project confirm the key traits outlined in the literature as important features that underlie any successful large-scale, research-to-practice initiative.

### IMPORTANCE FOR THE FIELD

Despite growing awareness of the need for better linkages between research production and research use, and increased capacity for mobilizing research knowledge, these capacities remain under-developed and variable (Campbell & Théberge, 2010). This case study provides evidence and findings arising from the growth of a knowledge network for applied education research, from the initial conceptual phase into a formal partnership and full implementation. It explores how a government can create supporting conditions for mobilizing research knowledge to improve practice across an education system (Fullan, 2010), with particular emphasis on building receptive cultures, skills and resources to support evidence use (Campbell and Théberge, 2010).