1. INTRODUCTION

Victoria’s government school network model is founded on an understanding that by increasing authority and responsibility at the network level, school improvement efforts will be enhanced through greater collaborative planning, the sharing of knowledge and expertise, and more effective resourcing.

We know that effective networks:
- draw on the expertise that resides within each network school and external to the network to improve student outcomes,
- realise the benefits of collaborative endeavour and joint problem solving within and across all networks,
- reach agreement about the most effective use of the human, financial and knowledge resources made available by all levels of the system,
- continually adapt and respond to emerging local issues, the performance expectations of the system and of the state and federal government,
- have a high degree of alignment around the purpose, expectations and accountability that enables them to address the differential needs of every student and school in the network,
- use evidence to identify priorities and establish improvement plans that will provide all students with access to an excellent education, and
- make public their current performance and goals for the future.

To operate effectively, networks must share their practice and their performance. A data sharing protocol is a formal agreement between network schools designed to achieve this end – it explains why data is being shared and sets out the principles and commitments schools make in agreeing to collect, store and disclose information about their performance.

The guidance in this document suggests some common elements that networks should aim to include within their own data sharing protocols. A lot of very good examples of data sharing protocols have already been produced and will be accessible within regions and across the state; reviewing some of these examples may also prove helpful.

2. PURPOSE OF PROTOCOLS:

A data sharing protocol should start by explaining the reasons for sharing the information. It should also state whether schools are obliged to, or are merely enabled to, share data. Where it is relevant to do so, the expected outcomes of sharing data can be explained or itemised. These outcomes may take the form of increased network knowledge and capacity, greater sharing of practice and ultimately, less variation in student outcomes both within and between network schools.

The purpose of the data sharing arrangement must be approved, understood and formally agreed by those entering into a data sharing agreement. Collective ownership of the protocol is crucial to whether or not the sharing of data will make a difference to improved practice.

3. SCOPE:

A protocol should describe what data is to be shared and how it is to be shared across the network schools. It may be appropriate to itemise the data sets included within the scope of the protocol, or in some cases, it may be more useful to describe what is excluded. Individual student or teacher-level data may be outside the scope
of the protocol for instance. Privacy legislation should be considered when agreeing upon the scope of the protocol.

4. PRINCIPLES OF DATA SHARING
Successful protocols establish a set of principles to guide the sharing of data and the learning that results from it. These principles should be understood by all and adhered to by all.

Some suggested principles are offered below. These have been adapted from Michael Fullan’s *Six Secrets of Change*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In this network:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. <strong>We interrogate our performance using a hierarchy of analysis:</strong></td>
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<td>− we look first at our own performance over time – that is, we look at the progress we have made this year compared to the trend established in prior years.</td>
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<td>− we then look at our performance relative to a fair and reasonable expectation – typically, this is determined by our SFO index. We ask the question – given the intake characteristics of our student population, are we performing below, at or above the level we would expect?</td>
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<td>− we then examine our results relative to an external or absolute standard – that is, how are we going relative to the entire state, or relative to absolute success (all students at the expected standard for instance)?</td>
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<td>2. <strong>We do not judge people based on their data and we do not apportion blame.</strong> Instead, we seek only to understand what it will take to improve.</td>
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<td>3. Although we take each years’ results seriously, we are cautious about drawing conclusions about any particular area of performance based only one year’s results. <strong>We prefer to examine four-year trends to determine if we are “stuck”, improving or declining.</strong></td>
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<td>4. <strong>We look at our performance from a range of perspectives and using a range of data sets to understand any particular student outcome area.</strong> We always consider contextual circumstances alongside our data – without context, we can never have a complete picture of our performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Data quality is paramount.</strong> At all times, we ensure we are using valid and reliable information, working within our schools to promote data quality and high standards of collection.</td>
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5. REVIEW
The way networks work with data will become increasingly sophisticated as relationships and levels of trust within the network develop. It is appropriate that data sharing protocols (and others) are reviewed in a structured and regulated way to ensure they reflect the way the network operates.

Acknowledgements

These guidelines are adapted in part from *Public Sector Data Sharing - A guide to Data Sharing Protocols*, published by the UK government’s former Department for Constitutional Affairs.