# Mind the gap:
## How digital tools help educators identify and support at-risk students

For most Australian students, school and tertiary education rounds out the emotional and financial support from their families, and prepares them to thrive. However, children without these privileges are increasingly at risk of falling behind.

In this paper, Philip Philipose, senior Solution Architect at TechForce Services, outlines how data and technology can help educators reverse the trend.

For our youth, especially those that are already disadvantaged, the consequences of dropping out of education are serious in the short and long term, as they risk being squeezed to the margins of society. The study *Counting the Cost of Lost Opportunities in Australian Education*[1], reported that:

> **"Students who disengage with their education are significantly disadvantaged with respect to their employment, health, wealth, and socio-cultural relationships."**

The COVID-19 pandemic has put at-risk students further behind, as they are disproportionately likely to face challenges from remote learning in terms of access to technology, financial resources, health and a safe, productive study environment.

## The critical role of educational institutions

While maximising the welfare of all students is the top priority, institutions are also legally required to track at-risk students, provide suitable assistance and put programs in place to improve their performance.

There is mandatory reporting on the number of at-risk students, interventions provided and their efficacy, with failure to comply leading to fines and serious penalties.

On top of compliance obligations, there is a significant commercial imperative for institutions to maintain low attrition rates in terms of attracting new students and maintaining a respected reputation.

For international students, the majority of bachelor level degrees are funded by parents either directly or via a loan, while domestic students typically take up student loans provided by the Government. Student drop outs mean these financial sponsors have wasted their money. High success rates are a strong selling point and differentiator, particularly for overseas students and international agents.

From governments, educational institutions, teachers, students, sponsors and local communities, identifying and supporting at-risk students is in everyone's best interest.

## Understanding the problem

The first step in the process is to know what to look out for. The Victorian State Government's Department of Education and Training[2] outlines the following risk factors:

- Erratic or no attendance
- Low literacy or numeracy / poor results attainment
- Lack of interest and/or stated intention to leave
- Negative interactions with peers
- Behavioural issues including aggression, violence, or social withdrawal
- Significant change in behaviour, attitude or performance.

While this has been a serious challenge for decades, advances in technology are proving a powerful tool to help educational leaders identify, monitor and assist at-risk students, as well as fulfil their legal reporting obligations.

Traditionally, tracking this information was a manual and hit-and-miss process based on qualitative information that was prone to missing early signs of decline. However, increasingly there are quantitative data sources that can be analysed to provide insights.

## Leveraging data and predictive analytics

Observant and engaged teachers and lecturers remain a crucial part of the process, but adding a layer of data, analytics and intelligence can help stop students falling through the gaps and build in predictive and proactive insights that allow you to take action earlier. Early intervention within education is critical to prevent serious long-term consequences.

In their report on *The Power of Data in Higher Education*[3], Accenture underlines the importance of using data and analytics to improve student outcomes.

> **" *Advanced analytics mean we don't have to guess at the drivers of student success. Machine learning quickly identifies factors that determine a student may be at risk – and then makes decisions and prioritises actions for university administrators to intervene.*"**

While the current levels of digitisation vary significantly across the education sector, Accenture goes on to assert that far from being something to strive towards in future, most institutions already have access to the data they need to make better decisions.

> **" *Concerns about the quality of data are usually misplaced. You likely already have enough data to drive preliminary insights, quickly identifying opportunities for growth.*"**

It is straightforward to identify already-failing students based on academic results. However, institutions can go a long way to predicting students who are moving towards the at-risk status by looking at trends in data such as attendance records, welfare assessments, background enrolment information, reports, overdue assignments and grades.

Capturing, centralising and analysing the data you already have opens the door to the all-important early intervention that can stop the performance slide before it becomes destructive.

## Questions to consider:

- How does your institution monitor current performance data to identify at-risk students?
- What methods do you have to predict and address low engagement?
- Do you have collaborative student support, management and communication processes?
- Do you have a plan to benchmark and optimise student engagement programs?
- Do you have a unified view of each student's data?

If you have gaps, manual processes or a lack of integration across these areas, it could be time to review how the latest educational technology solutions can help you maximise student welfare, meet your obligations and position your institution, and students, for success.

## Streamlined student engagement, communication and support

**Salesforce Education Cloud** is an end-to-end student and staff management solution for schools, colleges and universities that integrates processes and data across the student lifecycle providing a complete view of students, courses, engagement, communications and more.

Integrating processes from recruitment and enrollment to student management, it unifies your education data through system integration, connecting your institution's student management systems and operational software. A fully digital system enables you to use data analytics to identify struggling students, predict which students are becoming at-risk and run programs to intervene.

This means administration and teaching staff can proactively reach out to students in need before they decline too far, and it also provides students with a range of digital channels where they can access self-service resources or reach out for help.

To complement Salesforce Education Cloud for managing student engagement, Salesforce Marketing Cloud enables personalised communications across the student cohort and Salesforce Service Cloud can facilitate the management of interventions, remediations and follow ups.

## TechForce Services: Your education solutions specialists

With a track record of successful deployments in the education sector, TechForce Services can work with your team to design, deploy and support a customised digital education platform to streamline your operations, optimise your management of at-risk students and establish sophisticated reporting and predictive analysis.

Combining the power of the world's #1 customer relationship management solution with in-depth industry expertise can revolutionise how you identify and support at risk students in your educational institution.

*TechForce Services* *is an Australian Salesforce and cloud technology consulting company founded in 2015 by Salesforce MVP and Hall of Fame member Vamsi Krishna Gosu. Operating as your digital transformation partner, we simplify and streamline your systems to power growth and efficiency. Learn more and get in touch at* *www.techforceservices.com.au*

**Author:** *Philip Philipose* *is senior Solution Architect at TechForce Services. He has over 16 years of enterprise technology experience specialising in solution design and deployment of customer relationship management and cloud platforms.*

**References:**
1.   Lamb, S., & Huo, S. *Counting the Cost of Lost Opportunities in Australian Education.* Melbourne: Mitchell Institute, 2017.
2.   Victoria State Government: Department of Education and Training, 2021
3.   Accenture: Analyzing the College Experience: The Power of Data in Higher Education, 2018

If you'd like to learn more about TechForce Services education solutions, we'd be pleased to arrange a complimentary demonstration or no-obligation consultation. Contact an expert today: **(02) 4058 4100**, **hello@techforceservices.com.au** or **www.techforceservices.com.au**

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