



## SABER

## School Autonomy and Accountability

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*School autonomy and accountability are key components of an education system that ensure educational quality. The transfer of core managerial responsibilities to schools promotes local accountability; helps reflect local priorities, values, and needs; and gives teachers the opportunity to establish a personal commitment to students and their parents. Benchmarking and monitoring indicators of school autonomy and accountability (SAA) allows countries and World Bank Group partners to rapidly assess any given education system, setting the stage for improving policy dialogue, planning and implementation. The SABER-School Autonomy and Accountability tool assists in analyzing how well developed the set of policies are in a given country to foster managerial autonomy, assess results, and use information to promote accountability.*

### Why do countries invest in school autonomy and accountability?

Improved school management leads to better education outcomes. Decentralization, school autonomy, and community empowerment have been at the forefront of education policy discussions for years. As countries experiment with these variables, emerging evidence shows that higher management quality is strongly associated with better educational outcomes (Bloom et al. 2014). Having more managerial responsibilities at the school level implies that a school must also be accountable to local stakeholders as well as national and local authorities. The empirical evidence from education systems in which

schools enjoy managerial autonomy demonstrates that autonomy is beneficial for restoring the social contract between parents and schools and instrumental in setting in motion policies to improve student learning.

### What challenges exist?

Balance, country context, and local capacity are some of the challenges that contribute to effective implementation of SAA policies that can foster a positive impact on student learning.

**Balance.** Achieving the right balance of SAA is a challenge for every education system. To be effective, school autonomy must function on the basis of compatible incentives, taking into account national education

policies, including incentives for the implementation of those policies. The combination of school-based management (SBM) components that are crucial for enabling a better learning environment points to a set of variables that foster managerial **autonomy**, the **assessment** of results, and the use of this information to promote **accountability** (known as the 3As). All elements in balance are critical for achieving optimal success.

### Country context matters.

Knowing the context for SAA can help to avoid the risks inherent in its implementation in developing countries. SAA reforms can take many shapes and forms and this is usually in response to the country's political economy, education

goals, capacity, performance issues, and history. These contextual factors will influence the policies and design of intended SAA measures. One size does not fit all.

**Local capacity.** Without effective oversight and capacity to take on additional responsibilities at the school level, local stakeholders—namely parents and school councils—may not be able to understand school and student results enough to know how their schools are performing and to hold school authorities or governments accountable for underperforming schools. Additionally, structures of local accountability may not be in place in developing countries and “capture” by local elites may frustrate delivery of quality and equitable public service delivery of education. Changing existing structures of power in communities (e.g., holding general assemblies and ensuring school council elections and term limits) can improve opportunities for participation and voice.

## What is SABER-School Autonomy and Accountability?

Using new diagnostic tools and detailed policy information, the World Bank Group’s Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) platform collects and analyzes comparative data and knowledge on education systems around the world and highlights the policies and

institutions that matter most to promote learning for all children and youth. SABER’s detailed data-gathering and analysis are organized by “domains,” or areas of education policymaking within an education system. These currently include levels of education (early childhood development, primary and secondary, workforce development, and tertiary), types of quality resources and supports (school finance, school health and school feeding, and teachers), areas of governance (engaging the private sector and school autonomy and accountability), information sources (education management information systems and student assessment), and complementary inputs and cross-cutting themes (equity and inclusion, information and communication technologies, and resilience). SABER aims to give all parties with a stake in educational results—from students, administrators, teachers, and parents to policymakers and business people—an accessible, detailed, objective snapshot of how well the policies of their country’s education system are oriented toward ensuring that all children and youth learn.

SABER-SAA documents and analyzes SBM policies aimed at increasing autonomy and accountability at the school level and within the education system, in both developing and developed countries. By deepening SAA, school systems can redefine incentive structures

to create better conditions for teaching and learning. Autonomy and accountability do not generate incentives in isolation; they are interlinked with the assessment of teachers and learning at the school, with the use of information, and with the role of school councils. Such interconnections are critical in improving the education system as a whole, which is at the core of SABER’s approach.

## What drives effective school autonomy and accountability?

Available research suggests five policy goals that SAA should meet in order to enable a closed-loop system in which autonomy, assessment, and accountability reinforce each other in order to produce an enabling managerial environment that promotes better learning outcomes. The five main policy goals that are derived from this model and matter for success in SAA are the following:

**Level of autonomy in planning and management of the school budget.** School autonomy in the planning and management of the school budget is considered desirable because it can increase the efficiency of financial resources, give schools more flexibility in budget management, and give parents the opportunity to have more voice on budget planning and execution. Greater autonomy at the school level helps schools fight for central resources since they can use

the indicators of assessment to render accounts of student performance and in the process use moral suasion to get increased funding from the central level.

**Level of autonomy in personnel management.** This policy goal assesses policy intent in the management of school personnel, which includes the principal, teachers, and non-teaching staff. In fully decentralized education systems, schools can have autonomy in teacher hiring and removal decisions for their particular schools. This gives a clear signal to teachers that the school council has voice or the authority to weigh in on school personnel, which should make teachers more responsive to parents' needs.

**Role of the school council in school governance (participation).** This goal focuses on community participation and the role of the school council in school governance. This not only includes the community's ability to have a voice or oversee key school governance functions, but also how well supported those communities are to define and understand their roles, build capacity, execute the school plan and do so in a transparent and inclusive manner.

**School and student assessment.** In any education system, it is critical for stakeholders to know how well schools, teachers, and children are performing.

This policy goal looks at the importance of school and student assessment—their existence, frequency, and use of information generated from assessments to continually reflect and make pedagogical, operational, and personnel adjustments for the purpose of improving performance.

**Accountability.** School accountability is key for improving education quality and service delivery. This goal includes the policies that enable stakeholders to receive comprehensible information on their schools, provide oversight, comply with regulations, link rewards and sanctions, and create feedback loops across different levels of an education system from schools to centralized ministries.

### **How is SABER-School Autonomy and Accountability helping to improve education systems?**

SABER-SAA helps countries to identify the depth and scope of their programs and policies supporting SBM. As such, it aids in:

- Providing a quick but comprehensive review of the enabling managerial conditions that foster improved teaching and learning.
- Establishing a benchmark for tracking a country's progress in strengthening their SAA policies.

- Advancing informed policy dialogue and decision-making using a structured framework and methodology.
- Enhancing the global knowledge base on effective SAA policies and enabling cross-country learning.

### **How are countries and partner organizations using SABER-School Autonomy and Accountability to improve system effectiveness?**

**Burkina Faso.** The SABER-SAA policy diagnostic tool was adapted and expanded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and applied to examine the quality of the policy intent with respect to the SBM system in Burkina Faso. The resulting study, *Measuring Quality of Policies and Their Implementation for Better Learning: Adapting the World Bank's SABER Tools on School Autonomy and Accountability to Burkina Faso* (Yuki, Igei and Demas 2015), discusses the difference between policy intent and policy implementation, focusing on the functionality of school councils and their synergies with decentralization and assessment policies to achieve better learning results. The findings suggest that strengthening policy implementation within participatory school councils, along with decentralization and the use of assessment tools, is important for better learning results.

**Bulgaria.** Bulgaria's recent sweeping decentralization and efficiency-focused reforms included the introduction of per-capita based financing and the delegation of financial and decision-making autonomy to school principals. SABER-SAA was used to analyze Bulgaria's SAA policies, identifying potential areas of focus including parental and community participation in school governance, and the use of assessment information for accountability and for pedagogical, personnel, and operational adjustments at the school level.

**Morocco.** Interest in applying SABER-SAA in Morocco coincided with the completion of the Morocco Accountability and Transparency DPL in 2014 that paved the way for further support to the education sector through a new program-for-results project focusing on increasing access, quality, and education governance. The SABER-SAA policy intent benchmarking analysis and resulting country report was carried out in order to inform the development of the new Morocco Improving Basic Education Service Delivery Project (PAQSEM) now under preparation. The findings and recommendations from SABER-SAA have helped to underpin the proposed interventions under the component on improving governance for better education service delivery. It aims to increase autonomy,

efficiency and accountability at the regional and school levels. The SABER-SAA policy implementation tool was also used to shape the governance module of the Service Delivery Indicators (SDI) tool that is being applied as part of project preparation in order to better assess policy-implementation gaps in education service delivery.

**Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea.** The SAA policies were analyzed through SABER-SAA in these countries through funding from the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as part of the Pacific Benchmarking for Education Results (PaBER). The process opened up policy dialogue among stakeholders from the three countries and led to an interest in analyzing student assessment and teacher policies. The SAA policy analyses informed the countries' Education Sector Strategy Updates.

**Thailand.** In Thailand, SABER was used to contrast policy intent and policy implementation regarding SAA. Policy implementation data were obtained from a survey of principals from schools that participated in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 and the PISA data sets. The study analyzed the gap between policy intent and implementation. It then examined the effect of the

gaps between the two on various schooling outcomes, while controlling for covariates. In some cases, the analysis found significant differences between SABER-SAA indicators of policy intent and policy implementation. For example, schools in Thailand exercise more flexibility in their personnel management in practice than the level intended by policy; student assessments need to address issues of content, reliability, and validity; and better interpretation of student assessments is needed to make schools more accountable. There was a positive association between the PISA scores and SAA. Findings of the assessment were published in *School Autonomy and Accountability in Thailand: A Systems Approach for Assessing Policy Intent and Implementation* (Arcia, MacDonald, and Patrinos 2014).

## SABER-School Autonomy and Accountability Partners

The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is a strong supporter of SABER and education systems research and has done much work to support the application of SABER globally. The Australian Government was also the key partner for the SABER-SAA work in Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands.