

POLICY PAPER | 4

Knowledge Mobilization Cycle and Community of Practice **USE OF EVIDENCE IN EDUCATION**

Monitoring learning and the use of assessments
for educational improvement

2024

About this report

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This working document has been prepared as part of the Knowledge Mobilization Cycle and KIX LAC Community of Practice on the Use of Evidence in Education under the coordination of the Latin America and Caribbean Knowledge and Innovation Exchange Hub (KIX LAC).

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About KIX

The KIX initiative aims to connect the expertise, innovation, and knowledge of Global Partnership for Education (GPE) partners to help developing countries build stronger education systems. Through the exchange and financing of proven solutions and innovations, KIX (a) ensures that evidence-based solutions reach national policymakers and directly inform dialogue and planning processes; (b) creates and strengthens capacities to produce, integrate, and scale knowledge and innovation in GPE partner countries.

To this end, KIX has established regional hubs where partners meet to share information, innovation, and best practices. KIX also acts as a funding mechanism providing grants at global and regional levels to invest in knowledge generation and innovation, and to scale proven approaches. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is the grant agent for KIX.

Led by SUMMA in partnership with OECS, the KIX for Central Latin America and the Caribbean has been working since April 2020 to support the development of education systems in partner countries and contribute to ensuring the right to education in Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haïti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. To achieve its objectives, KIX LAC has defined three pillars:

- I. Establishment of priorities of the educational policy agenda
- II. Mobilization and exchanging of knowledge
- III. Strengthening regional and local capacities.

About SUMMA

SUMMA is the first Laboratory for Research and Innovation in Education for Latin America and the Caribbean. It was created in 2016 by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) with the support of the education ministries of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay. Since 2018, the ministries of Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama have also joined. Its mission is to contribute to and increase the quality, equity, and inclusion of the region's education systems by improving the decision-making process of educational policies and practices. To fulfill its mission, SUMMA organizes its actions into three strategic pillars that promote, develop, and disseminate (1) cutting-edge research aimed at diagnosing the region's main challenges and promoting shared work agendas; (2) innovation in educational policies and practices aimed at providing solutions to the region's main educational problems; and (3) collaboration spaces that allow for exchange between policymakers, researchers, innovators, and the school community based on a shared regional agenda.

About the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was established in 1981 as an intergovernmental organization to promote cooperation, harmonization, and integration among its member states.

OECS has developed significant knowledge exchanges and direct technical assistance among Ministries of Education. It has also been part of the Regional Education Strategy and has supported participatory planning processes. In this regard, OECS plays a strong leadership role with Caribbean states, especially in supporting the countries in this territory: Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. As a current partner of GPE, OECS has led the implementation of Education Sector Plans in these states.

Glossary of acronyms and abbreviations

LAC | Latin America and the Caribbean.

CXC | Caribbean Examination Council.

CLADE | Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education.

ERCE | Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study of the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education of UNESCO.

GPE | Global Partnership for Education

IDRC | International Development Research Center IDRC: International Development Research Center

KIX LAC | Knowledge and Innovation Exchange for Latin America and the Caribbean.

LLECE | Latin American Laboratory for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education.

OECS | Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

PISA | Programme for International Student Assessment (Programme for International Student Assessment of the OECD).

UNESCO | **United Nations** Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Introduction

This working document was prepared as part of the Knowledge Mobilization Cycle and KIX LAC Community of Practice on the Use of Evidence in Education under the coordination of the Latin America and Caribbean Knowledge and Innovation Exchange Hub (KIX LAC). The document aims to contribute to the consolidation of systems that support the monitoring of comprehensive learning of children and youth and the use of learning assessment results to inform decisions at the macro, meso, and micro levels.

Learning assessments are an essential measure of educational quality. Through them, it is possible to gather information about students' educational achievements and the performance of educational centers, thus determining the extent to which education systems are fulfilling their primary purpose.

In this context, most countries in the region have developed learning assessment systems. However, information alone does not generate educational improvement. For learning assessments to be truly useful and effective, it is necessary to develop concrete strategies that link the results with improvement policies.

The purpose of this document is to examine some strategies for using assessment results. To this end, the first part provides an overview of the general situation of the countries in the ALC region and the main trends observed in learning measurement and monitoring developed by education systems. Through a review of relevant evidence, we provide the community with some key insights and specific guidelines for using learning assessment results in a way that effectively contributes to improvement.

Emergence and development of learning assessments educational issues in Latin America and the Caribbean and the role of teachers as mediators.

Learning assessment systems at a large scale began to emerge in Latin America in the 1980s but developed more comprehensively in the 1990s. This development was reinforced by the introduction of international tests in the region, such as the UNESCO ERCE test, which began to be administered in 1997, and PISA, which debuted in 2000.

Learning assessments gain increasing importance once the goal of coverage begins to be at least partially achieved. As the enrollment rate for school-age children increases, attention shifts to the quality of education systems. This situation has been reinforced with a new perspective and a global consensus to improve both access and quality of education and learning outcomes (UNESCO 2019). For a system to be of quality, it is not enough to enroll a significant number of students; it must also provide benefits, and an essential measure of this is the achievement of learning outcomes defined as relevant by the curriculum.

In this way, large-scale learning assessment systems seek to provide detailed and reliable information to decision makers and education policy makers, families and society as a whole regarding the goals that students are achieving. Likewise, learning assessment allows for a view of the equity conditions of the education system, meaning its ability to address social, economic, cultural, and other inequalities and offer all children and youth the same opportunities to fully participate and develop.

Overview in Latin America and the Caribbean and uses of learning assessments for improvement.

National and transnational learning assessments have been gaining popularity. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the implementation of national assessment systems and participation in transnational assessments has increased.

Currently, most of the countries in the region implement some type of large-scale learning assessment system; however, these systems vary greatly from one country to another in terms of consolidation, trajectory and use. The types of assessments (summative and formative) vary in terms of levels and areas of learning assessed, frequency of assessment, and scope of the assessment, in terms of whether it is carried out in a census or sample manner and in the public or private sector or both.

Table 1: Examples of learning assessment systems in the region

País	Nivel	Evaluación	Grado	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Argentina	Primaria	Aprender	G6		●			●	●
	Secundaria alta		G12			●			●
Brasil	Primaria	Saeb	G2			●		●	
			G5			●		●	
	Secundaria baja		G9			●		●	
	Secundaria alta		G11			●		●	
Chile	Primaria	SIMCE	G4		●				●
	Secundaria alta		G10		●				●
Colombia	Secundaria alta	SABER 11	G11			●	●	●	
Ecuador	Primaria	Ser Estudiante	G3					●	●
			G6					●	●
	Secundaria baja		G9					●	●
	Secundaria alta		G11					●	●
Perú	Primaria	EM	G2			●			●
			G4			●			●
	Secundaria baja	EVA 2021	G8			●		●	
		EM	G8			●			●
Uruguay	Primaria	Aristas	G3	●			●		
			G6	●			●		
	Secundaria baja		G9		●				●
Países del Caribe	Secundaria alta	CSEC	G11			●		●	

● Año de aplicación de las evaluaciones nacionales seleccionadas para el análisis.

Source: UNESCO 2024

Differences in assessment systems affect the type of information available and the use that can be made of this information to promote system improvement. Assessment systems that address different levels and areas of learning allow for a closer monitoring of student achievement, while census systems allow for a specific orientation to each school.

National learning assessments have been reinforced by the implementation of transnational assessments. These assessments allow countries' performance to be compared in a broader context. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of participating countries in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) increased from 8 countries in 2000 to 14 countries in 2022. In the case of countries participating in the

UNESCO Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE), the number increased from 12 countries in 1997 to 18 countries in 2019.

Table 2: Participation of countries in LLECE assessments

País	1997	2006	2013	2019	2025
Argentina	x	x	x	x	x
Bolivia	x				x
Brasil	x	x	x	x	x
Chile	x	x	x		x
Colombia	x	x	x	x	x
Costa Rica	x	x	x	x	x
Cuba	x	x		x	x
Ecuador		x	x	x	x
El Salvador		x		x	x
Guatemala		x	x	x	x
Honduras	x		x	x	x
México	x	x	x	x	x
Nicaragua		x	x	x	x
Panamá		x	x	x	x
Paraguay	x	x	x	x	x
Perú	x	x	x	x	x
República Dominicana	x	x	x	x	x
Uruguay		x	x	x	x
Venezuela	x				

Source: own elaboration based on reports from the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE).

Historically, the fundamental use of learning assessment has been an essentially diagnostic one, aimed at providing an overview of student achievement and, thus, of the functioning of the education system as a whole.

Over time, the purposes and uses of learning assessment systems have expanded, fulfilling different functions in the development of improvement policies. Thus, the emphasis of assessments has shifted from a primarily diagnostic objective to an effort to use them to develop strategies for strengthening the system. This transformation is partly part of a general reformulation of the conceptions of educational assessment in the world, which have advanced from a notion of "assessment *for* learning" to one of "assessment *for* learning". Thus, the main focus of assessment systems today has to do with their capacity to contribute effectively to the improvement of learning, more than just measuring its achievements.

A review of specialized research allows us to identify a very varied set of uses for learning assessment systems (Ravela et al., 2001). In this context, and from the review of regional cases, it is possible to highlight three uses in particular that directly link learning outcomes with improvement strategies. These are briefly summarized below and developed throughout this document:

- ***To identify achievements and lags of the education system at the aggregate level and by segments, in order to inform education policies.*** The central purpose of any learning assessment system, which is primarily the responsibility of the central level (Ministry or Secretariat of Education and other related public institutions), is to provide a diagnosis of the functioning of the system and its different relevant segments. Properly used, this information can be very useful for the design and orientation of educational policies and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies implemented.
- ***Providing feedback to schools to promote internal improvement measures.*** A second fundamental use, which has been gaining strength in the region in recent years, has to do with the delivery of detailed information to schools for internal analysis and reflection. In this way, learning assessment is directly linked to improvement measures implemented by principals and teachers, and to the development of better pedagogical practices.
- ***Generate accountability measures:*** A third possible use is related to accountability-oriented measures. These are based on the determination of the results of each school, on the basis of which stimulus or pressure mechanisms are designed. It is therefore a strategy for making schools accountable, based on external control, which has aroused wide controversy at the political and technical levels, some of the dimensions of which are examined below.

USE 1 |

Identify students' achievements and lags and guide educational policies.

The first fundamental use of learning outcomes has to do with knowing the achievements of students and of the education system as a whole. In this sense, a comparative analysis by level and learning area is very important, as well as the monitoring of trajectories over time. Based on this information, the Ministry or Secretariat of Education can guide the development of important policies such as curriculum design, teacher training, generation of study materials and school counseling, among others.

Defining **learning levels or performance levels**, which describe in detail the knowledge and competencies achieved by students, is crucial. This makes learning outcomes meaningful indicators for the population and more easily usable for educational policies. An example is the regional ERCE test by UNESCO, which classifies student performance into four levels and describes the associated skills for each. For instance, in 3rd grade Reading, the test specifies what students at each level can do, such as locating explicit information, making inferences, or identifying the purpose of a text in various contexts (UNESCO, 2019).

Thus, when it is said that 44% of 3rd grade students in the region are in Reading Level I (the lowest), 18% in Level II, 22% in Level III and 16% in Level IV, it is known exactly what type of competencies and skills students master at each level and which ones are pending (UNESCO, 2019).

Many countries in the region have developed performance levels associated with their learning tests, which allows for better information to society and a more effective pedagogical use by public institutions.

For example, in **St. Vincent and the Grenadines**, three different diagnostic tests aim to improve the teaching and learning process by identifying performance areas and groups needing additional support, including gender-segregated data to address disparities (Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation, 2024).

A second dimension for the effective use of learning outcomes is the measurement of "**associated factors**," which are variables influencing student learning achievement. The ERCE study, for instance, collects information on socioeconomic status, previous preschool attendance, and class attendance levels. These data allow for a weighted analysis of learning outcomes and help identify the impact of different factors, useful for planning improvement policies.

In **Brazil**, for example, the analysis of factors associated with learning outcomes has made it possible to identify the negative effect of grade repetition on students, as well as the positive effect of having books at home. Both findings have led to the development of new policies in these two areas (Meraz Velasco, 2021).

A third type of analysis, related to the previous point, has to do with the **equity conditions** of education systems. The results of PISA 2022 indicate that no education system in the region can be considered highly equitable and there are significant differences depending on the socioeconomic context (Arias Ortiz et al., 2024). Learning outcomes provide very important information regarding the capacity of an education system to offer equitable conditions for all students, and thus to overcome differences of origin. Thus, several countries in the region use learning outcomes to compare the achievements of students from different geographical areas, ethnicities, gender, and other relevant conditions (Pinkasz, 2021).

In **Jamaica**, PISA 2022 results show that socioeconomically advantaged students outperformed disadvantaged students in mathematics, and girls outperformed boys in both mathematics and reading (OECD, 2023). In **Trinidad and Tobago**, PISA assessments in 2009 and 2015 informed the Ministry of Education's "Education Policy Paper 2017-2022" (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Ensuring these results impact educational policy planning requires concrete management mechanisms linking learning outcomes with planning, support, and targeting improvement policies. A good example in this regard is provided by **Brazil**, which has built a Commitment of All for Education (CTE) Plan that seeks to improve the quality of basic education through collaborative work between municipalities and states using learning test results as a fundamental indicator. The results of learning assessments are also used in Brazil to identify and prioritize municipalities in difficulties (Meraz Velasco, 2021). Another example is found in **Mexico**, which used the results of national and international learning tests to build a National Educational Assessment Policy, which in turn was connected to State Programs for Educational Assessment and Improvement (PEEME) (Castro et al., 2021).

Studies to improve knowledge about educational strategies are another relevant use. In **Ecuador**, learning assessment tests (SER tests) have been used to investigate the impact of specific educational programs such as the Mathematics Assisted Learning Platform, the implementation of the International Baccalaureate, and the Improvement Plans (Chiriboga, 2021).

USE 2 |

Provide feedback to schools and intermediate bodies for educational improvement.

A second fundamental use of learning assessment systems is providing feedback to schools. This information is vital for directors and teachers, promoting improvement strategies within schools. Significant progress has been made in the region in diagnostic evaluations to monitor students and report timely and individualized data.

To this end, most countries in the region have made significant efforts to generate results reports that are useful and easy to use by educational institutions. Likewise, efforts have been made to strengthen data analysis capabilities that allow schools to make the most of these data

(Ferrer & Fiszbein, 2015). In **St. Vincent and the Grenadines**, preschool diagnostic tests help teachers develop targeted student-centered interventions (Unesco Institute for Statistics & Global Alliance to Monitor Learning, 2018).

Delivering detailed learning results to schools has proven effects on educational improvement. First, it encourages schools to place learning results at the center of their management. Secondly, a good analysis of the results allows managers and teachers to identify strong and weak areas, and to generate processes of reflection and planning for improvement. Ultimately, the analysis of learning outcomes should lead to the reorientation of teachers' pedagogical work.

Several research studies in the region have shown that providing detailed learning results to schools contributes to educational improvement. A study in **Argentina** found that detailed reports of student results in language and mathematics significantly improved learning in a short period (De Hoyos et al., 2021). In **Mexico**, the Educational Support Program (PAE) based on detailed result delivery also showed a positive impact on learning (De Hoyos et al., 2017). The program was based on the census test of learning then in force in Mexico (ENLACE), from which an individualized delivery of results to each school was implemented, along with a support visit for the analysis of the results. The program also included a small number of support workshops. This research suggests that it is not enough to make the results available, but that it is important to provide them to the schools on an individual basis, and if possible accompanied by a workshop or joint analysis session..

The importance of installed capacities becomes evident, since not all schools have the same capacity to improve based on the results provided. In this line, there is evidence that highlights the importance of managerial skills in the use of data, in order to take advantage of the information provided (Adelman & Lemos, 2021). In this context, **Peru's** educational reform, for example, considered as one of its central elements the strengthening of managerial capacities for the use of data. Likewise, specific mechanisms were introduced to promote the use of data in school planning (Saavedra & Gutierrez, 2020). In **Chile**, meanwhile, research also points to the importance of reflective data use capabilities to effectively promote improvement measures (Parra & Matus, 2016).

In this context, it is important to recognize that not all schools have the same capacities, and therefore, not all can move towards improvement in an equitable manner. For this reason, some authors recommend moving towards models that promote school autonomy, but at the same time maintaining centralized state accompaniment, with a focus on capacity building (Cevallos, 2016). In this sense, it is important to link the delivery of results with differentiated support strategies depending on the reality of each school.

USE 3 |

The use of learning outcomes for accountability.

A third type of use of learning outcomes is related to accountability mechanisms for schools and their main educational actors, i.e., principals and teachers.

Accountability mechanisms are based on the generation of results for each school, and therefore require the application of a census-based learning assessment system. Based on the individualized information for each school, measures are generated to stimulate schools to take responsibility for their results, for which they must define their own improvement measures.

The mechanisms to encourage schools to take responsibility for their results can be of different types. In some cases they can be associated with direct consequences, either positive or negative. In some **Brazilian** states, for example, when schools obtain good results, they are associated with bonuses or economic incentives for principals or teachers. In **Chile**, similar measures have been implemented, but also some of a punitive nature. In the most extreme case, if a school obtains consecutive low results, it may even risk closure. These types of measures are part of "high consequence" accountability policies.

On the other hand, there is also a wide range of "low-consequence" accountability policies (Ravela, 2006), that is, where learning results have some kind of effect for schools, but do not imply direct sanctions or stimuli. A characteristic modality of this type is the dissemination of results among the school's educational community. In this way, parents and guardians of the students themselves are expected to exert pressure and stimulate improvement, without the need to assign direct consequences. In **Honduras**, the evaluation of both teachers and students has no consequences and aims to serve as an input for accountability and decision making (FEREMA, 2017 taken from Galas et al., 2020).

Another option is the public dissemination of results, as happens in countries such as **Chile, Colombia and Guatemala**. In these cases, public exposure of the results can have an impact on school management, but it can also generate undesired effects, such as the creation of rankings and public comparisons by the media and other entities.

Accountability based on learning outcomes is a controversial policy. Some research suggests that its effects are negative, as they exacerbate competition between schools, punish schools that serve vulnerable students, and may tend to deprofessionalize teachers, curricular narrowing and test training (Falabella & de la Vega, 2016).

However, it is also necessary to recognize that accountability models have been effective in different contexts in Latin America. In **Brazil, the state of Ceará** has implemented one of the emblematic reforms in the continent, with important achievements that have brought the state to the top of the country's results. In this context, the municipality of Sobral - the state capital - has implemented an elaborate accountability system based on student learning outcomes

(Loureiro & Cruz, 2020). This system includes rewards for schools that obtain good results in literacy, and differentiated salary bonuses for teachers according to the results obtained by their students (McNaught, 2022). In the state of **Sao Paulo**, teacher bonus policies based on learning outcomes have also been implemented (Meraz Velasco, 2021).

Conclusions and considerations

Evidence shows that learning assessments can be very useful in promoting educational improvement strategies. Their use is therefore not limited to providing information but has gradually become an integral part of the educational system at the service of improvement. Thus, the heavy investment involved in these systems is justified to the extent that it is linked to concrete mechanisms and strategies for support, educational strengthening, and monitoring.

Based on the literature review, some guiding considerations are presented to strengthen the use of large-scale standardized assessment results.

At the level of public policy and central agencies:

- Evaluations must respond to clear objectives and needs and have the appropriate instruments to implement and interpret their results (State of the Nation Program, 2023).
- The use of assessments must be designed for educational improvement and linked to improvement strategies. (KIX-LAC 2024 Mobilization Cycle).
- Learning assessment systems benefit from having a theoretical and regulatory framework, institutional organization and mechanisms for the dissemination and use of established results (State of the Nation Program, 2023).
- Learning assessments should be linked to country curriculum plans (KIX-LAC 2024 Mobilization Cycle).
- It is necessary to identify factors that impact learning in order to fulfill educational justice and the right to education for all students (KIX-LAC 2024 Mobilization Cycle).
- It is essential to identify learning differences between population groups according to region, gender, socioeconomic level, ethnicity and others (KIX-LAC 2024 Mobilization Cycle).
- Educational management practices that are related to good learning outcomes should be identified (KIX-LAC 2024 Mobilization Cycle).
- It is necessary to evaluate the effect or impact of different educational support policies and programs on learning outcomes (KIX-LAC 2024 Mobilization Cycle).
- Strengthen the technical capacities of subnational states and local users (Pinkasz, 2021).

At the level of the educational institution:

- It is essential to provide detailed information to schools to promote internal improvement strategies (KIX-LAC 2024 Mobilization Cycle).

- Generate specialized reports for each audience and distinguish between audiences and users (State of the Nation Program, 2023; Pinkasz, 2021).
- The leadership of the educational center regarding the use of data should be enhanced (Parra and Matus, 2016).
- Promote strategies for analysis and reflection of the reports (KIX-LAC 2024 Mobilization Cycle).
- Dissemination mechanisms, capacities and participation of the different actors in the use of results for institutional improvement and linkage at the classroom level should be strengthened (Parra and Matus, 2016).

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