

WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT



LEARNING

TO REALIZE EDUCATION'S PROMISE

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Foreword

Education and learning raise aspirations, set values, and ultimately enrich lives. The country where I was born, the Republic of Korea, is a good example of how education can play these important roles. After the Korean War, the population was largely illiterate and deeply impoverished. The World Bank said that, without constant foreign aid, Korea would find it difficult to provide its people with more than the bare necessities of life. The World Bank considered even the lowest interest rate loans to the country too risky.

Korea understood that education was the best way to pull itself out of economic misery, so it focused on overhauling schools and committed itself to educating every child—and educating them well. Coupled with smart, innovative government policies and a vibrant private sector, the focus on education paid off. Today, not only has Korea achieved universal literacy, but its students also perform at the highest levels in international learning assessments. It's a high-income country and a model of successful economic development.

Korea is a particularly striking example, but we can see the salutary effects of education in many countries. Delivered well, education—and the human capital it creates—has many benefits for economies, and for societies as a whole. For individuals, education promotes employment, earnings, and health. It raises pride and opens new horizons. For societies, it drives long-term economic growth, reduces poverty, spurs innovation, strengthens institutions, and fosters social cohesion.

In short, education powerfully advances the World Bank Group's twin strategic goals: ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. Given that today's students will be tomorrow's citizens, leaders, workers, and parents, a good education is an investment with enduring benefits.

But providing education is not enough. What is important, and what generates a real return on investment, is learning and acquiring skills. This is what truly builds human capital. As this year's *World Development Report* documents, in many countries and communities learning isn't happening. Schooling without learning is a terrible waste of precious resources and of human potential.

Worse, it is an injustice. Without learning, students will be locked into lives of poverty and exclusion, and the children whom societies fail the most are those most in need of a good education to succeed in life. Learning conditions are almost always much worse for the disadvantaged, and so are learning outcomes. Moreover, far too many children still aren't even attending school. This is a moral and economic crisis that must be addressed immediately.

This year's Report provides a path to address this economic and moral failure. The detailed analysis in this Report shows that these problems are driven not only by service delivery failings in schools but also by deeper systemic problems. The human capital lost

because of these shortcomings threatens development and jeopardizes the future of people and their societies. At the same time, rapid technological change raises the stakes: to compete in the economy of the future, workers need strong basic skills and foundations for adaptability, creativity, and lifelong learning.

To realize education's promise, we need to prioritize learning, not just schooling. This Report argues that achieving learning for all will require three complementary strategies:

- *First*, assess learning to make it a serious goal. Information itself creates incentives for reform, but many countries lack the right metrics to measure learning.
- *Second*, act on evidence to make schools work for learning. Great schools build strong teacher-learner relationships in classrooms. As brain science has advanced and educators have innovated, the knowledge of how students learn most effectively has greatly expanded. But the way many countries, communities, and schools approach education often differs greatly from the most promising, evidence-based approaches.
- *Third*, align actors to make the entire system work for learning. Innovation in classrooms won't have much impact if technical and political barriers at the system level prevent a focus on learning at the school level. This is the case in many countries stuck in low-learning traps; extricating them requires focused attention on the deeper causes.

The World Bank Group is already incorporating the key findings of this Report into our operations. We will continue to seek new ways to scale up our commitment to education and apply our knowledge to serve those children whose untapped potential is wasted. For example, we are developing more useful measures of learning and its determinants. We are ensuring that evidence guides operational practice to improve learning in areas such as early-years interventions, teacher training, and educational technology. We are making sure that our project analysis and strategic country diagnoses take into account the full range of system-level opportunities and limitations—including political constraints. And we will continue to emphasize operational approaches that allow greater innovation and agility.

Underlying these efforts is the World Bank Group's commitment to ensuring that all of the world's students have the opportunity to learn. Realizing education's promise means giving them the chance not only to compete in tomorrow's economy, but also to improve their communities, build stronger countries, and move closer to a world that is finally free of poverty.



Jim Yong Kim
President
The World Bank Group

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Abbreviations

A4L	Assessment for Learning
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
BRN	Big Results Now in Education (Tanzania)
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education (Bangladesh)
CCT	conditional cash transfer
CSEF	Civil Society Education Fund
DISE	District Information System for Education (India)
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
GDP	gross domestic product
GNECC	Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition
I-BEST	Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training
ICT	information and communication technology
IDEB	Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (Index of Basic Education Development, Brazil)
LLECE	Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PASEC	Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs de la Confemem (Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems)
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPP	purchasing power parity
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SAR	special administrative region
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIMCE	Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación (Education Quality Measurement System, Chile)
SNED	Sistema Nacional de Evaluación de Desempeño (National Performance Evaluation System, Chile)
SNTE	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Union of Educational Workers, Mexico)
TERCE	Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WIDE	World Inequality Database on Education