



Policy Goals

Status

1. Autonomy in Planning and Management of the School Budget

Operational budget is prepared and executed by the school level, reviewed at the district (DESB) and provincial (PESS) levels, and approved by the central Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). Parents play a role through their representatives on the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC). The MoES manages salaries, and the PESS and DESB pay teachers based on a centrally determined pay scale. Schools can raise additional funds from any source.

Established
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2. Autonomy in Personnel Management

The MoES appoints new teachers to the education system, and provincial and district levels then deploy teachers to schools. Principals at all schools are appointed and deployed at the provincial level. The PESS and DESB are both involved in their evaluation, but only the MoES has authority to dismiss principals if warranted.

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3. Participation of the School Council in School Governance

The VEDC has a voice in several aspects of school governance such as the operating budget, financial oversight, select oversight of learning inputs to the classroom (pupil attendance and local curricula), and volunteer activities. The VEDC does not participate in management of personnel. No policies for elections or term limits for VEDC members are in place, nor are there mandated general assemblies with the wider community.

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4. Assessment of School and Student Performance

Various school assessments take place annually. Results of school self-assessments are supposed to inform the creation of school development plans. No national standardized student assessments exist, but the MoES is preparing a policy and plans to support them. Only occasional donor-supported standardized student assessments have been implemented.

Emerging
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5. Accountability to Stakeholders

Financial compliance, transparency, and reporting requirements exist at each level of the education system, and for the central level they include fines for noncompliance. Manuals and guidelines set out roles and responsibilities for school operations. In contrast, no guidelines are in place for standardized assessment, comparative analysis, use, and dissemination of student performance results.

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Introduction

In 2011, the World Bank Group commenced a multi-year program designed to support countries in systematically examining and strengthening the performance of their education systems. Part of the World Bank's Education Sector Strategy,¹ the evidence-based initiative called SABER (Systems Approach for Better Education Results) is building a toolkit of diagnostics for examining education systems and their component policy domains against global standards, best practices, and in comparison with the policies and practices of countries around the world. By leveraging this global knowledge, the SABER tools fill a gap in the availability of data and evidence on what matters most to improve the quality of education and achievement of better results. This report discusses the results of applying the SABER School Autonomy and Accountability (SAA) tool in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Country Overview

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR or Laos) was established on December 2, 1975, under the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP). The LPRP remains the single party of government and is framed by a Marxist-Leninist ideology. As did China and Vietnam, Lao PDR has pursued a route of "market socialism." Lao PDR is located in the heart of the Indochina peninsula in Southeast Asia with a land area of 236,800 square kilometers, three-quarters of which is covered by mountains and plateau. It is a landlocked country sharing long borders with Vietnam to the east and Thailand to the west and shorter common borders with Cambodia, China, and Myanmar.

Lao PDR is an ethnically diverse country, and the livelihoods of most ethnic minorities have deep roots in the natural environment. The population at over 6.7 million comprises four main ethno-linguistic groups (Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Chine-Tibet, and Hmong-lu Mien) and 49 officially recognized ethnicities.² The Lao-Tai is the largest ethnic group, which accounts for around 67 percent of the population. Many of the minority ethnicities live in rural, physically isolated areas. The demographic breadth and geographic challenges are important factors to take into account for the expansion and delivery of quality education services.

Over the last two decades, Lao PDR has enjoyed peace and stability as well as sustained economic growth. With a Gross National Income per capita of US\$1,740 in 2015 up from US\$280 in 2000, Lao PDR is undergoing a sustained economic expansion.³ The country is in the midst of a fast-growing region, and this growth has been driven by greater use of natural resources, especially land, forestry, water, and minerals, and increased economic engagement with the region. This combination of comparative advantages, along with targeted policies to utilize them, has yielded an average in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate officially estimated at close to 7.5 percent per year for the last 15 years, moving Lao PDR from a lower-income country to lower-middle-income status.

Despite this growth, Lao PDR is still one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia, and reducing poverty remains a high priority. The country met its Millennial Development Goal (MDG) of reducing extreme poverty to below 24 percent by 2015, and living conditions improved significantly. Analysis of the most recent household survey shows that the national poverty headcount dropped by half from 46 percent in 1992–93 to 23 percent in 2012–13.⁴ Even with such a decline, the poverty rate in rural areas, where nearly three-fourths of the country's people live, is still high (28.6 percent) and measures almost three times higher than in urban areas (10 percent).

¹ The World Bank Education Sector Strategy 2020: Learning for All (2011), which outlines an agenda for achieving "Learning for All" in the developing world over the next decade.

² Lao Population and Housing Census 2015.

³ World Development Indicators 2015.

⁴ The 5th Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey in 2012–13. The survey has been carried out every five years.

I. Education in Lao PDR

The Lao society and its education system have been impacted by a heritage of indigenous culture, colonialism, the socialist revolution, the market economy and privatization, and more recently, globalization. Since the introduction of a market economy in the early 1990s, the national education system has gradually improved in terms of quality and quantity. The current education system has developed through a hybrid approach, which has drawn together the best aspects from the education system of the colonial era with those of the semi-royalist era, together with the emphases of the revolutionary era. The recent system has also introduced ideas pertaining to “new education,” drawing on lessons learned from historical perspectives and experiences in other countries, as well as influences from global pressure and conditions.

The education system in Lao PDR is structured into four main parts: early childhood education, general education, technical and vocational education, and higher education.⁵ In addition to child care for the earliest years, there is kindergarten for children ages three to five. General education begins at age six with entry to primary school, which covers grades 1–5. This is followed by lower secondary and upper secondary school. In parallel to upper secondary, Lao PDR offers technical and vocational education for those 15 years and older. Graduates from upper secondary and technical education and training (TVET) programs are eligible to apply to higher education institutions to continue their education (see Table 1).

Education strategy. The National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) 2016–20 and the 10th Lao People’s Revolutionary Party Congress emphasize the pivotal role that education must play in enabling the country to reach its national development goal of graduating from the least developed countries by 2020.

Education Level	Ages	Grades
1. Early Childhood Education: - Child Care - Kindergarten	0.3–2 3–5	
2. General Education: - Primary Education - Lower Secondary Education - Upper Secondary Education	6–10 11–14 15–17	1–5 6–9 10–12
3. Technical and Vocational Education: - Certificate - Diploma - Advanced Diploma	15 + 18 + 18 +	
4. Higher Education - Pre-Bachelor’s - Bachelor’s - Master’s - Doctorate	18 + 18 +	

Source: Education Law, revised version 2015.

Improving access to and quality of education are key goals of the NSEDP (2016–20), which is also centered on achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs No. 4 and 5).⁶ These goals are integrated into the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2016–20, which serves as the overarching framework for sector policies and guidelines for both the government’s policies and programs and the development partners’ support.⁷ The current ESDP is developed from the foundation set by the previous policy and strategy frameworks: National Education System Strategy Reform 2008–15, Education Sector Development Framework 2009–15, and ESDP 2011–15.

Education system performance. Although Lao PDR was an early signatory to the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and the MDGs, the country still faces challenges achieving them. Drawing from recent Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) data from the 2015–16 school year,⁸ primary enrollments have risen to 98.8 percent

⁵ Education Law 2015.

⁶ Goal No. 4: Quality Education; Goal No. 5: Gender Equity.

⁷ The ESDP 2016–20 consists of 11 targeted outcomes, and it outlines various intermediate outcomes and strategies for achieving the stated goals and objectives.

⁸ EMIS Annual Report 2015–16.

of the age cohort, but repetition and dropout rates are high, resulting in 79.6 percent of students surviving until grade 5 and only 77.9 percent completing the full five years of the primary cycle. These low survival and completion rates are significantly affected by primary schools classified as “incomplete schools” (19.1 percent) that do not offer a full five grades of the primary cycle. Many of these schools are staffed by only one or two teachers, with about 26.6 percent of classrooms being operated as multi-grade classes, and many more are in poor physical condition. Participation in secondary school is also low, with gross enrollment rates of only 82.2 percent in lower secondary school and 47.8 percent at the upper secondary level.

Key challenges at the primary level include dropout and repetition in the lower grades, as well as overall low quality of education. The repetition and dropout rates in grade 1 are high at roughly 11.5 percent and 7.2 percent, respectively,⁹ and this issue might be related to the complexity of the Lao context. With its ethnically diverse population, Lao PDR adds an additional set of challenges around literacy with many children not speaking Lao (the official language) at home. This poor language skill affects learning outcomes across the board, and as a result, many children leave the education system early without mastering literacy and numeracy skills.

In addition, results from recent student assessments—Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO)¹⁰—have demonstrated that the current levels of functional literacy and numeracy skills are not sufficient to support quality learning in higher grades of primary and lower secondary education. The EGRA 2012 shows low levels of reading ability and comprehension in the early grades. Almost 30 percent of grade 3 students were unable to read a single word of a given text, and a further 30 percent of those who could read at least one word did not comprehend what they read. Results of the ASLO assessment administered in 2009 showed that only eight percent of grade 5 students demonstrated the Lao language skills required to learn independently in grade 6 (the first grade of secondary education) without remedial assistance. Additionally, the 2012 ASLO assessment found that 23 percent of grade 3 students demonstrated the ability to analyze sentences and passages from reading and listening to stories. For math, the majority of grade 3 students performed poorly, with only 12 percent achieving levels necessary to function independently after grade 3. The low level of functional literacy and numeracy skills are attributed to the struggle that teachers face to complete the full curriculum, especially Lao language and mathematics, during the school year.

Investing in education. The commitment to education has been accompanied by increases in resources, but there is a need to improve the efficiency of spending and to increase the share of the budget that goes to non-salary operational spending. The Government of Lao PDR has set a target of 18 percent of its total budget on education, but according to the latest available budget figures, spending is increasing but falling short of the target. In the FY 2014–15 budget, for example, 14.6 percent of the total budget was for education, up from 13.2 percent in FY 2010–11.¹¹

The ESDP 2011–15 identified the low level of non-wage recurrent spending as a major constraint to improving quality of teaching and learning and strengthening governance. Therefore, the ESDP prescribed an increase of the share of non-salary recurrent expenditures to 25

Table 2: Selected Education Indicators	
Public Expenditure on Education (2014–15)	
As % of GDP	3.6
As % of total government expenditure	14.6
Distribution of Public Expenditure per Level (%) (2013–14)^a	
Pre-primary	2.56
Primary	31.56
Secondary (including TVET)	29.57
Tertiary and other	36.3
Teacher/Pupil ratio in primary	1:34
Percentage of repeaters in primary	5.8
Primary to secondary transition rate	91.7
<i>Source:</i> MoES, Department of Finance 2016.	
^a Budget allocation by subsectors and types of expenditure approved by National Assembly, FY 2013–14.	

⁹ EMIS Annual Report 2014–15.

¹⁰ Early Grade Reading Assessment administered in 2012 and National Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes.

¹¹ ESDP 2016–20 and MoES Department of Finance.

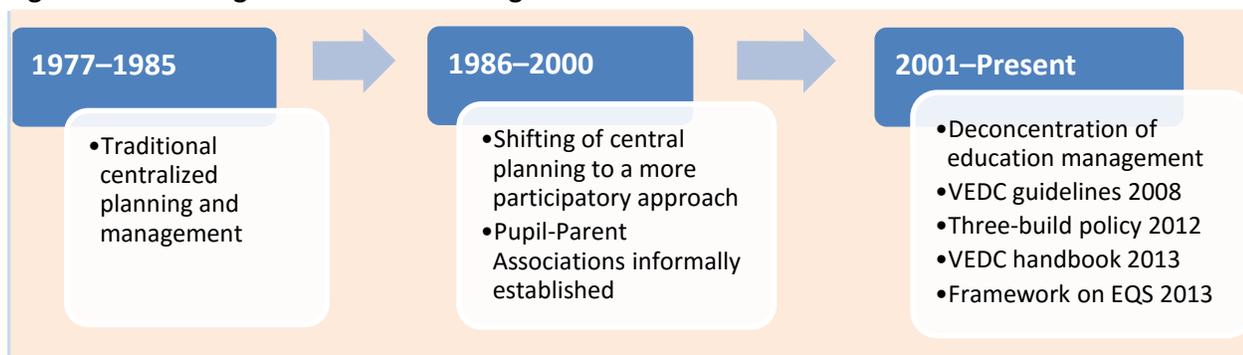
percent of the total education budget by 2015, notably with the introduction of school block grants for operational expenditures.

The current ESDP 2016–20 puts emphasis on the expansion of early childhood education, primary education, lower secondary, and TVET and reiterates the need to raise education quality. The financing requirements indicate therefore the need to increase investment in these sub-sectors and operational expenditures such as school block grants, in-service teacher training, textbook replenishment, pedagogical advisor visits, etc.

Development of school-based management and policy framework in Lao PDR. Education management in Lao PDR has evolved over three periods of time since independence (Figure 1).¹² The first reform took place from 1977 to 1985; this was in the form of a traditional or classic management style with a focus on centralized planning and management. The second period was from 1986 to 2000 and shifted from central planning toward a more participatory approach. During this time the Pupil-Parent Association (PPA) was informally established. The official regulations on the PPA were approved by the MoES in 2002. The third reform of education management was introduced in the early 2000s, resulting from the MoES implementation guideline on de-concentration of education management in 2002, Ref. No. 1500. Since then, a numbers of development partners began to support foundations for school-based management. To further strengthen the School-Based Management (SBM) approach, the MoES issued implementation guidelines on establishing the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) in 2008, Ref. No. 2300, and approved the VEDC handbook (2013) to support school management. These legal documents have clearly outlined rights and responsibilities of the VEDC to participate in school decision making and implementation.

In February 2012, the Government of Lao PDR issued the Resolution of Politburo, Ref. No. 3 regarding the three-build policy that outlines the responsibilities of three tiers of governing: the province as a strategic unit, the district as a strengthened planning and management unit, and the village as a development unit. The MoES promulgated a new deconcentration policy in August 2012, Ref. No. 1183, spelling out the roles and responsibilities of education administration organizations at each level (including schools) and experimentally began implementing the three-build policy in the education sector. In 2013 the MoES officially issued the framework of Education Quality Standard (EQS) for primary schools, which gives ownership for schools and the community to develop their annual school development plan (SDP). The newly revised Education Law (2015) includes Article No. 86, which defines rights and responsibilities in education administration organizations that are consistent with the concept of SBM. Also, the current Education Sector Development Plan (2016–20) emphasizes the importance of SBM in improving students’ learning outcomes in schools.

Figure 1: Three Stages of Education Management Reform in Lao PDR



¹² A summary note from the national workshop on school-based management, dated July 8–9, 2015.

II. The Case for School Autonomy and School Accountability

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 (Box 1). Benchmarking and monitoring indicators of school autonomy and accountability allow any country to rapidly assess its education system, setting the stage for improving policy planning and implementation.

Box 1: What Are School Autonomy and Accountability?

School autonomy is a form of school management in which schools are given decision-making authority over their operations, including the hiring and firing of personnel and the assessment of teachers and pedagogical practices. School management under autonomy may give an important role to the School Council, representing the interests of parents, in budget planning and approval, as well as a voice/vote in personnel decisions. By including the School Council in school management, school autonomy fosters accountability (Di Gropello 2004, 2006; Barrera, Fasih and Patrinos 2009).

In its basic form **accountability** is defined as the acceptance of responsibility and being answerable for one's actions. In school management, accountability may take other additional meanings: (i) the act of compliance with the rules and regulations of school governance; (ii) reporting to those with oversight authority over the school; and (iii) linking rewards and sanctions to expected results (Heim 1996; Rechebei 2010).

School autonomy is a form of a decentralized education system in which school personnel are in charge of making most managerial decisions, frequently in partnership with parents and the community. More local control helps create better conditions for improving student learning in a sustainable way, since it gives teachers and parents more opportunities to develop common goals, increase their mutual commitment to student learning, and promote more efficient use of scarce school resources.

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. Having more managerial responsibilities at the school level automatically 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 is that autonomy is beneficial for restoring the social contract between parents and schools and instrumental in setting in motion policies to improve student learning.

The progression in school autonomy in the last two decades has led to the conceptualization of SBM as a form of decentralization in which the school is in charge of most managerial decisions but with the participation of parents and the community through school councils (Barrera et al. 2009). *SBM is not a set of predetermined policies and procedures, but a continuum of activities and policies put into place to improve the functioning of schools, allowing parents and teachers to focus on improvements in learning.* As such, SBM should foster a new social contract between teachers and their community in which local cooperation and local accountability drive improvements in teachers' professional and personal performance (Patrinos 2010).

The empirical evidence from SBM shows that it can take many forms or combine many activities (Barrera et al. 2009) with differing degrees of success (see Box 2). Unless SBM activities contribute to system closure, they are just a collection of isolated managerial decisions. Therefore, the indicators of SBM that relate to school quality must conform to the concept of a system, in which the presence or absence of some critical components within the system allow or preclude system closure.

Box 2: Different Paths to School-Based Management Are Fine as Long as They Allow for System Closure

In many countries the implementation of SBM has increased student enrollment, student and teacher attendance, and parent involvement. However, the empirical evidence from Latin America shows very few cases in which SBM has made a significant difference in learning outcomes (Patrinos 2010), while in Europe there is substantial evidence showing a positive impact of school autonomy on learning (Eurydice 2007). Both the grassroots-based approach taken in Latin America, where the institutional structure was weak or service delivery was hampered due to internal conflict, and the operational efficiency approach taken in Europe where institutions were stronger, coincide in applying managerial principles to promote better education quality, but driven by two different modes of accountability to parents and the community. One in Latin America where schools render accounts through participatory school-based management (Di Gropello 2004) and another in Europe where accountability is based on trust in schools and their teachers, (Arcia, Patrinos, Porta and Macdonald 2011). In either case, school autonomy has begun to transform traditional education from a system based on processes and inputs into one driven by results (Hood 2001).

As components of a managerial system, SBM activities may behave as mediating variables: they produce an enabling environment for teachers and students, allowing for pedagogical variables, school inputs, and personal effort to work as intended.

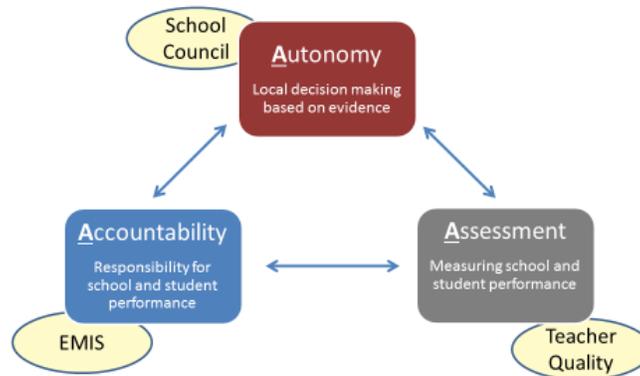
When do SBM components become critical for learning? The improper functioning of a school or a school system can be a substantial barrier to success. The managerial component of a school system is a necessary but insufficient condition for learning. One can fix some managerial components and obtain no results, or alter some other components and obtain good results. What combination of components is crucial for success is still under study, but the emerging body of practice points to a set of variables that foster managerial **autonomy**, the **assessment** of results, and the use of the assessment to promote **accountability** among all stakeholders (Bruns et al. 2011). When these three components are in balance with each other, they form a “closed system.”

Defining a managerial system that can achieve closure is conceptually important for school based management, since it transforms its components from a list of managerial activities to a set of interconnected variables that when working together can improve system performance. If an SBM system is unable to close, are partial solutions effective? Yes, in a broad sense, in which schools can still function but their degree of effectiveness and efficiency would be lower than if the system closes. In this regard, **SBM can achieve closure when it enforces enough autonomy to evaluate its results and use those results to hold someone accountable.**

This last conclusion is very important because it means that *SBM can achieve system closure when autonomy, student assessment, and accountability, are operationally interrelated through the functions of the school councils, the policies for improving teacher quality, and Education Management Information Systems (EMIS; see Figure 2).*

Figure 2

School Autonomy & Accountability The 3 A'S



Source: Demas and Arcia 2015.

Note: EMIS = education management information system.

In managerial terms it is clear that the point of contact between autonomous schools and their clients is primarily through the school council (Corrales 2006). Similarly, school assessments are the vehicles used by schools to determine their needs for changes in pedagogical practices and to determine the training needs of their teachers. Both pedagogical changes and teacher training are determinant factors of teacher quality (Vegas 2001). Finally, the role of EMIS on accountability has been well established, and it is bound to increase as technology makes it easier to report on indicators of internal efficiency and on standardized test scores (Bruns et al. 2011).

Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) suggest that, when autonomy and accountability are intelligently combined, they tend to be associated with better student performance (OECD 2011). The experience of high-performing countries¹³ on PISA indicates that:

- Education systems in which schools have more autonomy over teaching content and student assessment tend to perform better.
- Education systems in which schools have more autonomy over resource allocation and that publish test results perform better than schools with less autonomy.
- Education systems in which many schools compete for students do not systematically score higher on PISA.
- Education systems with standardized student assessment tend to do better than those without such assessments.
- PISA scores in schools with students from different social backgrounds differ less in education systems that use standardized student assessments than in systems that do not.

As of now, the empirical evidence from countries that have implemented school autonomy suggests that a certain set of policies and practices are effective in fostering managerial autonomy, assessment of results, and use of assessments to promote accountability. Benchmarking the policy intent of these variables using SABER can be very useful for any country interested in improving the performance of its education system.

¹³ Examples of high performing countries that have implemented school-based management policies and frameworks include Canada, the Netherlands, and New Zealand, among others.

SABER School Autonomy and Accountability: Analyzing Performance

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 from assessments to promote accountability. There are five policy goals for school autonomy and accountability. Below are the main indicators that can help benchmark an education system’s policies that enable school autonomy and accountability:

1. School autonomy in the planning and management of the school budget
2. School autonomy in personnel management
3. Role of the School Council in school governance
4. School and student assessments
5. Accountability

Each of these policy goals has a set of policy actions that make it possible to judge how far along an education system’s policies are in enabling school autonomy and accountability. Each policy goal and policy action is scored on the basis of its status, and the results are classified as Latent, Emerging, Established, or Advanced:

Latent ●○○○	Emerging ●●○○	Established ●●●○	Advanced ●●●●
Reflects policy not in place or limited engagement	Reflects some good practice; policy work still in progress	Reflects good practice, with some limitations	Reflects international best practice

A *Latent* score signifies that the policy behind the indicator is not yet in place or that there is limited engagement in developing the related education policy. An *Emerging* score indicates that the policy in place reflects some good practice but that policy development is still in progress. An *Established* score indicates that the program or policy reflects good practice and meets the minimum standards but there may be some limitations in its content and scope. An *Advanced* score indicates that the program or policy reflects best practice and can be considered on par with international standards.

III. Lao PDR's Performance: A Summary of Results

A summary of the results of the benchmarking exercise for Lao PDR are shown below, followed by a breakdown by policy goal.

Autonomy in planning and management of the school budget is *Established*. The school principal along with the Village Education Development Committee (VEDC) prepare and execute the operational budget of the school once it is reviewed by the district (District Education and Sports Bureau [DESB]) and provincial (Provincial Education and Sports Services [PESS]) levels and approved by the central Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). Parents play a role through their representatives on the VEDC. The MoES manages salaries, and the PESS and DESB pay teachers based on a centrally determined pay scale. Schools can raise additional funds from any source.

Autonomy in personnel management is *Emerging*. The central MoES appoints new teachers to the education system, and the provincial and district levels then deploy teachers to schools. Principals at all schools are appointed and deployed by the provincial level. The PESS and DESB are both involved in principal evaluation, but only the MoES has authority to dismiss principals if warranted.

The role of the VEDC in school governance is *Emerging*. The VEDC has a voice in several aspects of school governance such as operational budget issues, financial oversight, and some oversight of learning inputs to the classroom (pupil attendance and local curricula), but the VEDC does not participate in personnel management. No regular elections or term limits are set for VEDC members, nor are there mandated general assemblies with the wider community.

School and student assessment is *Emerging*. Various school assessments take place annually. The results of school self-assessments are supposed to inform the creation of school development plans. No national standardized student assessments are held; however, the MoES is preparing policies and plans to support them. Only occasional donor-supported standardized student assessments have been implemented.

Accountability to stakeholders is *Emerging*. Financial compliance, transparency, and reporting requirements exist at each level of the education system, and for the central level requirements include fines for noncompliance. Manuals and guidelines set out roles and responsibilities for school operations. In contrast, there are no guidelines for standardized assessment, comparative analysis, use, and dissemination of student performance results.

1. Autonomy in the planning and management of the school budget is *Established*.

This policy goal focuses on the degree of autonomy that schools have in planning and managing their budgets. To evaluate policy intent, the scoring rubric makes clear which areas should be backed by laws, regulations, and/or official rules in the public record. 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.

In Lao PDR, the policies and manuals that establish who and how a school's operating budget is prepared and executed are fairly well established and can be considered advanced. The main documents include the following: (1) Stages and Specifications for the Creation of the State Budget, Article 51 of Law 02/NA dated 6 December 2006; (2) Manual on the Management and Unitization of the School Block Grant (SBG) MoES/Department of Finance (DoF) 2015; (3) School Management Handbook Volume 1 for Primary School Principals, MoES, 2013; and (4) School Block Grant Guideline, 2015, Part III, Process for Budgeting and Implementation, Section 1.

Overall, the operational budget is prepared and executed at the school level by the VEDC, reviewed at the district and provincial levels, and approved by the MoES. Parents play a role in the formulation and execution of the budget through their representatives on the VEDC.

The stages and roles of principals in preparing and submission of the school budget are defined in Document 1 referenced above. Document 3 describes how each school must prepare its operating budget in March or April of each year and present a proposed budget to the body under which it operates (i.e., local authorities). The SBG manual (Document 2) provides instructions on preparing the financial information and administration of the school operational budget (the SBG) and the budgeting and budget implementation process.

In principle and based on the guidelines for school development plans, the school conducts a School Self-Assessment over a period of three days with participation from school staff, VEDC members, and some representatives from parents. On the last day (day 3), all school stakeholders prioritize the items in their plan and calculate into budget their proposed plan, which includes some cost details. The reality in rural and remote schools is that school principals and teachers play significant roles in preparing the school budget plan for the year because many village authorities and VEDC have limited reading and writing abilities.

Stages and Specifications for the creation of the State Budget, Article 51 of Law 02/NA dated December 6, 2006, and Document 2 above indicate that the head of the DESB reviews and endorses the school budget and then submits it to the PESS. The DESB or PESS summarizes the information received from the school and discusses joint planning of the school development plan with concerned entities. It further develops an aggregated plan based on budget needs, according to the budget line items, and submits it to the respective authority (by October).

The Manual on Management and Utilization of the School Block Grant 2015 indicates that the school entity has the responsibility to implement the SBG (in Lao PDR this is the school's operating budget) according to the SBG manual and financial regulations. The SBG guidelines outline the list of eligible expenditures for operational budget execution, steps for budget submission and consolidation, and financial reporting at different levels. Parents and community members are part of the VEDC. They are required to participate in the process of school self-assessment, school development planning, and budgeting. These include data collection for self-assessment, spending the budget for teaching and learning materials, and repairs as well as advice and oversight of the overall process. Regular meetings are also organized by Village Chief (head of VEDC) for the wider community /parents to meet and discuss school operations.

Non-teaching staff salaries. The policies underpinning the determination of salaries for non-teaching staff are guided by the civil servant grades if the non-teaching staff are civil servants. In this case, the MoES has the legal authority to pay salaries based on civil servant grades and steps as described in Chapter 8, Article 40 of the Prime Ministerial Decree on Civil Service. Article 40 sets out guidelines for grades and steps that are based principally on the level of education or managerial position. It includes qualifications, education credentials, and criteria for each grade starting with grade 2. There may also be non-teaching staff who are not civil servants. In this case, generally, the school level hires informally, but no policy is in place that states that schools are able to fill their needs locally. There is also no guideline stating if the VEDC should be consulted on setting the contracted non-teaching staff salary.

Teacher salaries. The MoES has legal authority over management of teacher salaries. The PESS and DESB pay teachers based on the central pay scale. The MoES Department of Personnel confirmed that most teachers are civil servants. In some cases there are locally hired contract teachers, but numbers are low. For teaching staff who are civil servants, the central government has the legal authority to pay salaries based on civil servant grades and steps as described in Article 40 cited above. The MoES sets the pay scale for teacher salaries based on qualifications and guidelines, but local government pays the salaries to teachers. For civil servant teachers there is no consultation on salaries because this is all managed centrally.

Additional school funding. The Education Law 2007, Article 57 outlines that the primary source of the school budget comes from government and that schools can raise additional funds to supplement that budget. The Education Law dated July 16, 2015, Article 59 and the School Management Handbook for Primary School Principals 2013, Volume

1, p. 30, stipulate seven possible sources of funding for schools. They can raise or receive funds from the central budget, local budget, contributions from the community, international organizations (donors), state organizations, the private sector, and individual contributors. These policies on raising additional funds from almost any source are considered advanced.

Collaborative budget planning. According to MoES policies and guidelines, the country has an established collaborative budget planning and preparation process that allows the school level to propose a school budget to the subnational level as a request for funding. The VEDC has the authority to submit a budget proposal to DESB. The district level is supposed to use the proposed budget by the school level as a reference for the next step in the process where DESB and PESS consolidates and submits budget requests from schools to the MoES for approval.

1. Legal authority over planning and management of the school budget is ESTABLISHED.		
Policy Action	Score	Justification
1A. Legal authority over management of the operational budget	Advanced ●●●●	Operational budget is prepared and executed at the school level by the school and VEDC, reviewed at district (DESB) and provincial (PESS) levels, and approved by the MoES. Parents play a role in the formulation and execution of the budget through representation on the VEDC.
1B. Legal authority over the management of non-teaching staff salaries	Emerging ●●○○	For non-teaching staff who are civil servants, the MoES has the legal authority to pay salaries based on civil servant grades. For contract non-teaching work, the school level may hire informally.
1C. Legal authority over the management of teacher’s salaries	Emerging ●●○○	The MoES has legal authority over management of teacher salaries. The PESS and DESB pay teachers based on a central pay scale.
1D. Legal authority to raise additional funds for the school	Advanced ●●●●	Schools can raise additional funds from any source.
1E. Collaborative budget planning and preparation	Established ●●●○	VEDC can submit a budget proposal to the DESB. The district level is to use the proposed budget by the school level as a reference.

2. School autonomy in personnel management is Emerging.

This policy goal measures policy intent in the management of school personnel, which includes the principal, teachers, and non-teaching staff. Appointing and deploying principals and teachers can be centralized at the level of the Ministry of Education, or it can be the responsibility of regional or district governments. In decentralized education systems schools have autonomy in teacher hiring and firing decisions. Budgetary autonomy includes giving schools responsibility for negotiating and setting the salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff and using monetary and nonmonetary bonuses as rewards for good performance. In centralized systems, teachers are paid directly by the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Finance under union or civil service agreements. As a result, in centralized systems schools have less influence over teacher performance because they have no financial leverage over teachers. Inversely, if a school negotiates teachers’ salaries, as private schools routinely do, it may be able to motivate teachers directly with rewards for a job well done.

In Lao PDR, the MoES retains the overall role and responsibility in management, training, appointment, and deployment of teaching and non-teaching staff, according to Article 83 of the Education Law dated July 16, 2015.

However, Articles 84 and 85 make it clear that local governments (provincial and district) are responsible for proposing their school staffing and deployment plans to the MoES based on the quota issued by MoES. The MoES has authority to appoint/recruit teachers into the system, based on proposals from the PESS and DESB. The annual teacher staffing plan that articulates school staffing needs is prepared by the DESB, based on school inputs, and then it is submitted to the PESS for consolidating as a provincial plan before sending it to the MoES. At this stage, the MoES consults with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) for civil servant quotas, and the MoHA has authority to reduce the quota if necessary.

Once the MoES approves the recruited teachers, the PESS informs the DESB about the approved quotas, and teachers are allocated into target schools. Teacher deployment takes place at the PESS and DESB levels with decrees issued to deploy new teachers to respective districts and schools. No further approval is needed by the central level. For teachers already in the system, transferring teachers between schools is handled by the PESS if moving from district to district and by the DESB if moving from school to school within a district. The process is described in the Instruction Manual for the Annual Teacher Recruitment and Deployment Plan issued by the MoES Department of Planning and Personnel, Section 6, 2013.

Teacher deployments are not made under civil servant agreements per se, though Article 25 of the Prime Minister’s Decree 177 on Teachers equates teachers with “general civil servants.” Teacher contracts follow general civil servant agreements on items such as leave and retirement pay.

For non-teaching school staff, the same decrees and processes apply as those for teachers. However, non-teaching staff positions are not commonly requested by Lao primary schools. Some larger, urban schools may request non-teaching staff, and they would be included in the school staffing plan. According to the MoES Deputy Director of the Department of Personnel, non-teaching staff would be hired as civil servants who pass the appropriate exam.

Authority to appoint and deploy school principals rests with the Chief of the PESS, according to Section 2.3.6 of Decree No. 1500/DOP.02 on Implementing Decentralization in the Education Sector, March 2002. The Chief appoints the director and deputy director of lower secondary schools, upper secondary schools, complete secondary schools, and principals of primary schools and kindergartens. The MOES appoints higher administrative positions. The DESB has the responsibility to monitor and evaluate the performance and behavior of directors, deputy directors, and principals at the respective schools.

2. School autonomy in personnel management is EMERGING.		
Policy Action	Score	Justification
2A. Autonomy in teacher appointment and deployment decisions	Emerging ●●○○	Central MoES appoints new teachers into the education system. Provincial (PESS) and district (DESB) levels then have authority to deploy teachers to schools.
2B. Autonomy in non-teaching staff appointment and deployment decisions	Emerging ●●○○	Central MoES has the authority to appoint non-teaching staff based on the proposed staffing plan from PESS, and the provincial and district authorities have the authority to deploy.
2C. Autonomy in school principal appointment and deployment decisions.	Established ●●●○	Principals at all schools are appointed and deployed by the provincial level (PESS). The PESS and DESB are responsible for their evaluation, but only MoES has the authority for determining removal.

3. Participation of the School Council in school governance is Emerging.

The participation of the School/Parent Council in school administration is very important because it enables parents to exercise their real power as clients of the education system. If the council has to cosign payments, it automatically has purchasing power. The use of a detailed operational manual is extremely important in this area, since it allows Council members to adequately monitor school management performance, help the principal with cash flow decisions, and become a catalyst for seeking additional funds from the community. The use of such manuals by the School Council is thus a good vehicle for promoting increased accountability and institutionalizing autonomy.

It is important to note that change management studies also have provided evidence that bringing stakeholders together to plan and implement meaningful activities also contributes to behavioral change in institutions, including schools. Collective school planning activities can provide a mutual vision and shared accountability of what parents and school staff can commit in terms of support to the school. These processes provide an enabling environment for better governance.

In Lao PDR two organized groups allow for parental and community involvement in school affairs. The VEDC is equivalent to a “school council” and is established by the Ministerial Agreement 2300/Edu.OP/08, September 2008. There is also a Parental Association that has a less formal standing. According to the School Management Handbook Vol. 1 for Primary School Principals, MoES, 2013, the organizational structure of the VEDC includes the following members:

1. Village Chief as president
2. President of the Village Front for Safeguarding and Construction (neohome) as vice president
3. School principal as secretary
4. Teacher representative(s) as member(s)
5. President of the village Lao Women’s Union (LWU) as a member
6. Secretary of the village Lao People’s Revolutionary Youth Union (LPRYU) as a member
7. President of the parents’ association as a member.

The number of members of a VEDC can range from 7-15 depending on the size of the village, appropriate to context, and as agreed by the District Education for All (EFA) Development Committee.

Participation in budget preparation. The VEDC has a voice in planning and preparation of the operating budget in collaboration with the school principal. The VEDC is part of the school-level body that is responsible for managing the implementation of School Block Grant (SBG), which is essentially the school’s operating budget. The VEDC along with the parents’ association and the community all have roles in the development of the School Development Plan (SDP) according to the Manual on the Management and Utilization of the School Block Grant MoES/DoF 2015.

The VEDC, as stated in the manual, plays an important role in mobilizing the whole community in the school planning and development process. In this respect, the VEDC should be particularly responsible for community sensitization to the importance of school education and mobilization of the Parent Association and wider community for their active participation in various steps for school development (not just for contributions).

The school principal in collaboration with the VEDC has responsibility for preparation of the school’s operating budget. However, the school principal is the most important person in school administration and management in terms of their roles, responsibilities, and duties. One of the seven management tasks for which a principal is responsible is to manage the school budget. The school principal is the “manager” of financial management for the school budget and is the “authorized person” who has the final authority in school financial management.

Participation in financial oversight. The District Governor appoints the VEDC members and establishes it as an authorized body. The head of the VEDC is part of the SBG management team at the school level. They have legal authority to have a voice on school-level operational budget issues and oversight authorities. Their responsibilities

include implementation and management of their school's SBG and oversight and reporting on the use of grant funds to local authorities at the district level. According to the VEDC handbook, the VEDC is also responsible for management of community funds.

Participation in personnel management. There is no statement in the referenced documents that provide a voice or a right to the VEDC for expressing an opinion on teacher appointments, transfers, and removals. According to informants Director General of the Department for Teacher Education, the VEDC has the right to make comments on transferring or moving teachers if the teacher's behavior is inappropriate, such as high absenteeism or violence in the school. However, the decision is made at the DESB level. For the teacher appointment, no opportunity exists for VEDC to have a voice, since these decisions are made at the central MoES according to policy.

Participation in school activities. Formal instructions, manuals, and mandates are set up for organizing community volunteers to plan and implement activities. The Parent Association Rules No. 269, February 21, 2002. Section 1, state that the objective and role of the Parent Associations are to contribute, participate in school activities, and help promote community awareness on the importance of education and community participation in school management/activities. This includes contributing to school construction, teaching and learning materials/equipment, and working with teachers/schools in solving any school issues, including oversight of student attendance and supporting teachers.

The Guidelines for Education Administrators on Implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) for Pre-School and Primary Education, Section V, sets out the role of the VEDC. According to the Guidelines, the VEDC plays an important role for mobilizing the whole community in school planning and mobilizing the Parent Association and wider community for active participation in various steps for school development activities and school development planning. Although guidelines exist, the capacity levels of the VEDCs vary across schools, and some may not function in accordance with policy and as envisioned through the manuals and guidelines supporting their functioning. The MoES currently has support through donor projects to strengthen principal and VEDC capacities.

Participation in learning inputs. The VEDC has authority to voice an opinion on local curricula and oversee some learning inputs to the classroom. The Handbook for VEDC, June 2013, MoES, states the VEDC has a voice in monitoring and assisting teachers in their teaching, for those members who have expertise in a subject field that is being taught. They can assist teachers especially in the teaching of local curricula and in producing teaching equipment and materials.

In terms of managing the use of the curricula, principals must coordinate with the VEDC in finding materials, equipment, and media that are consistent and well suited to local circumstances so that these may be provided for use in learning and teaching in the school (School Management Handbook for Achieving Education Quality Standards for School Principals 2013, Vol. 1, Chapter 2 Section V.A.).

The VEDC's oversight role can include monitoring teacher and student attendance, ensuring children's participation in school, and assisting the teacher in their teaching including production of teaching material/equipment, according to the Handbook for VEDC, 2013, MoES.

Transparency in community participation is considered latent because no regular elections are held for VEDC or term limits. Instead the members of the VEDC are appointed and are somewhat predetermined because they are usually heads of other types of committees. Additionally, no policy mandates exist for the school and VEDC to hold general assemblies with the wider community to discuss school planning, SBG investments, annual goals, and outcomes.

The DESB has the responsibility for facilitating bottom-up education planning including dissemination of SBM guidelines and providing trainings to schools/VEDCs in school management according to the Guidelines for Education Administrators on Implementation of School-based Management (SBM) for Pre-school and Primary

Education, 2015. One of the main duties of the DESB is to organize SBM-related training to schools/VEDCs on school management and school development planning.

3. Role of the school council in school governance is EMERGING.		
Policy Action	Score	Justification
3A. Participation of the School Council in budget preparation	Established ●●●○	The VEDC has a voice in planning and preparation of the operating budget in collaboration with the school principal.
3B. Participation in financial oversight	Established ●●●○	The VEDC has legal authority to have a voice on operational budget issues and oversight authorities.
3c. Participation in personnel management	Latent ●○○○	There is no formal right or voice provided to the VEDC for expressing opinions on teacher appointments, transfers, and removals.
3D. Community participation in school activities	Established ●●●○	There are formal instructions, manuals, and mandates for organizing volunteers to plan and implement activities.
3E. Community participation in learning inputs	Established ●●●○	The VEDC has legal authority to voice an opinion and legal oversight on some learning inputs to the classroom. (oversight of pupil attendance, voice on local curricula).
3F. Transparency in community participation	Latent ●○○○	There are no regular elections for VEDC or term limits. There are no general assemblies with the wider community. But a unit is in charge of providing policy and capacity-building support to schools.

4. Assessment of school and student performance is Emerging.

School assessments can have a big impact on school performance because it encourages parents and teachers to agree on scoring rules and ways to keep track of them. Measuring student assessment is another important way to determine if a school is effective in improving learning. A key aspect of school autonomy is the regular measurement of student learning, with the intent of using the results to inform parents and society, and to make adjustments to managerial and pedagogical practices. Without a regular assessment of learning outcomes, school accountability is reduced and improving education quality becomes less certain.

School assessment. In Lao PDR schools are supposed to be assessed annually using MoES criteria. Various ways are used to assess school performance as well as a few policies and guidelines to support school assessment. The School Development Handbook for Achieving Education Quality Standards (EQS) for Principals, Vol. 2, May 2013 states that the EQS are the national standards approved in 2012. The EQS are comprised of 42 indicators to assess schools in six aspects: the learners, learning and teaching, the environment, learning and teaching materials, management and administration, and community participation. Guidelines for Education Administrators on Implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) for Preschool and Primary Education 2015 describe the steps for conducting the school assessment using EQS indicators.

School self-assessment is part of the prerequisite for developing the School Development Plan and the annual budget request to be submitted to the district (DESB). According to the School Development Handbook for Achieving EQS for Principals, school self-assessment must be conducted in May of the school year and the school development plan is to be submitted to the DESB by September each year. No regulation is in place yet for school-self assessment only the Handbook for EQS and Manual on Management and Utilization of the School Block Grant (SBG) currently exist. The handbook states that school assessment should be conducted every year; however, the

process is new and is dependent right now on donor support. At the district level 80 percent of district staff have been trained in school-self assessment. The district then trains the school level on the use of the tool and the guidelines. About 30 percent of schools have been trained in school self-assessment and 10 percent have completed their self-assessments and SDPs (10 percent = about 900 schools). The districts are continuing to deliver the cascade of training to the school level with the support of the MoES and the Second Global Partnership for Education Project.

According to the Handbook, the committee responsible for implementing the school self-assessment comprises about five to seven members, detailed as follows: the school principal, one or two deputy school principals, two representatives from the VEDC, and two to three representatives from the teachers. The duties of the committee include (1) preparing the necessary assessment tools and data on the school, (2) conducting the self-assessment process according to the stages laid out, (3) summarizing the assessment results, and (4) writing annual reports (summaries and school development plans).

The Handbook Section 2.8.1 indicates that the school self-assessment is analyzed at the school level and sent to district level from the school. There is no policy yet (only handbook guidelines) to require the district to summarize school results by standards and report findings. The Education Standards and Quality Assurance Centre (ESQAC) is working on formulating a pilot to test this district function and summary reporting by standards.

Another part of school assessment is conducted by a district-level pedagogical advisor, according to the Prime Ministerial Decree on Early Childhood Education and Primary Pedagogical Support, MoES, No. 5683, October 22, 2015. This decree describes the role of the District Level Pedagogical Advisor (PA). The PA is responsible for assisting the school principal in conducting assessment and evaluation of teaching and learning at the school, advising and assisting teachers in lesson planning, developing teaching methodology, and developing teaching materials. The PA also provides suggestions and recommendations on technical management at the school and on coordination between the community, the VEDC, and relevant entities.

The Pedagogical Advisory Center at the district level collects feedback from the PA to plan and solve education issues and follow up with, advise, and assist teachers on technical matters. The Center reports the findings to the DESB, which is responsible for providing a summary report to inform the PESS and MoES. The ministry organizes annual meetings with PAs to discuss and exchange ideas.

In conclusion, according to the Education Law/SBG Guidelines, inspection of the education system includes inspection of implementation of law, finance, budget, and roles and responsibilities of the concerned entities/persons at all levels, including schools and teaching and non-teaching staff. Monitoring and inspection are conducted on a regular basis. The district will be responsible for supervision at the school level, and in accordance with the Handbook and EQS guidelines, the school is supposed to conduct a school self-assessment every year, but because of a limited budget, only schools supported by development partners can maintain the school self-assessment. School self-assessment is mainly to help schools develop their plans, which they are supposed to do every year, in principle; it is not aimed at making any adjustments—pedagogical, operational, personnel, etc.

Student assessment. The only national standardized student assessment in Lao PDR is the general education upper secondary-level graduation exam administered at the end of grade 12, according to Decree No. 1500/DOP.02, Section 2.5.3 Learning Assessment, Final Examination and Certificate Issuance (March 2, 2003). No other national standardized exams are given, only exams that are prepared at the provincial and district levels. The Teachers' Handbook: Organizing Teaching and Learning for Primary Education, issued by the MoES, contains a chapter on student assessment that focuses on informal assessments that may comprise various methodologies including observation, verbal tests, written tests, and the like, designed and conducted by teachers. There are also guidelines on what a written test should cover.

The MoES Research Institute for Educational Science (RIES) is working towards establishing a policy and supporting resources for national standardized testing at certain points in the educational cycle. Through donor support the RIES has administered an Assessment of Student Learning Outcome (ASLO) for grade 3 in 2009 and for grades 3 and 5 in 2013, but it is not scheduled for implementation on a regular basis and no government funds are dedicated for the exam. An Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) is another standardized test that was conducted once in 2012 to a sampling of grade 3 students. Schools are not obligated to make any adjustments in teaching based on the results of the exams. The results of tests such as ASLO and EGRA are mainly used to revise the national curriculum, as it is now being implemented and supported by development partners. No standardized student assessments are in place and no policy mandating who should receive the results of student assessments. For past donor-supported student assessment, such as ASLO, the RIES confirmed that the ASLO reports are available to the public.

4. School and student assessment is EMERGING.		
Policy Action	Score	Justification
4A. Existence and frequency of school assessments	Established ●●●○	Policy indicates that schools are assessed every year using MoES criteria (school self-assessment and district inspection/pedagogical advice).
4B. Use of school assessments for making school adjustments	Established ●●●○	Schools analyze their self-assessments and report findings to the DESB. Results of school self-assessment are supposed to inform creation of school development plans. Results may be used for operational or personnel adjustments.
4C. Existence and frequency of standardized student assessments	Latent ●○○○	There is no policy indicating that standardized student assessment should take place and how often.
4D. Use of standardized student assessments for pedagogical, operational, and personnel adjustments	Latent ●○○○	No national standardized student assessment is used for making pedagogical, operational, and/or personnel adjustments.
4E. Publication of student assessments	Latent ●○○○	No policy mandating publication of student assessment results is in place. Results of donor-supported standardized student assessments have been published in the past.

5. School accountability to stakeholders is Emerging.

Accountability is at the heart of school-based management. The systemic connection between budgetary and personnel autonomy, parent participation in the financial and operational aspects of a school, and the measurement of learning outcomes are all aimed at reinforcing accountability. Only by being accountable to parents can educational quality be sustainable. The indicators below address aspects of accountability that can be implemented within the SBM framework.

Since Lao PDR does not have a policy supporting national standardized student assessment, there is also no specific guideline for the use of student assessment results. The “Teachers’ Handbook on Organizing Teaching and Learning for Primary Education” describes the objectives of assessment in improving teaching and learning at the school level, including guidance on how to assist students who need additional help. It discusses implementing assessment, but no further instruction is provided on using results of assessment.

There are no national standardized assessments and no provisions for comparative analysis of results and dissemination of results. Policies and mechanisms supporting accountability for student performance are weak. In

the past, only under donor funding, the two ASLO reports compared the results between provinces and districts, but they could not compare between years because ASLO for grade 3 was conducted once in 2009, and then ASLO for grade 5 was conducted in 2013. ASLO results were made public, by sharing them with parents, education officers, and some teachers through workshops and meetings.

In terms of *financial accountability*, all levels within the education sector have requirements for financial compliance, transparency, and reporting. These requirements are stated clearly in several government decrees and handbooks that provide detailed guidance for implementation. Article 60 of the President's Decree No. 01/PO Law on State Budget, 2006, states that the National Treasury and Provincial Treasuries must review all state budget expenditure before disbursement from the Treasury and verify the MoES's and PESS's authority and disbursement requests. If it is discovered that the MoES or PESS has instructed disbursements not in line with the laws and regulations, the Treasury is entitled to immediately advise them to correct the issue.

The MoES Department of Planning is required to send execution reports to Ministry of Planning and Investment, and the MoES Department of Finance is required to send execution reports to Ministry of Finance Budget Department. Article 77 of the Law on State Budget says that the MoES Department of Finance must maintain accounts and keep records in accordance with accounting laws and regulations and the budget nomenclature. They must coordinate with the National Treasury to reconcile all realized budget revenues and expenditures with budget execution reports to ensure completeness, accuracy, and timeliness.

For the central level, sanctions (fines) for noncompliance can be levied according to Article 88 of the Law on State Budget. Any individual or organization will be fined in the event they do not follow the law and accompanying procedures. Paragraph 4 of Article 88 states that failure to implement standards or conditions provided by the laws and regulations, such as failure to maintain accounting records, lack of vouchers, or lack of business standards, is submitted to the Ministry of Finance or the concerned sector.

The relationships involved in budget preparation and financial reporting between schools and the district, provincial, and central levels are described in the Manual on the Management and Utilization of School Block Grants, MoES/DOF, 2015. This manual details the responsibilities for complying with financial management and transparency among the three levels and describes the financial regulations that schools must follow. In Part II, Section 1, it states that the accountant is responsible for monitoring the expenditure items, keeping certificates of payment transactions related to financial expenditures, making sure the documents are accessible for internal and external review, and reporting income and outcome based on the bank account, cash, debits, and credits for the month, quarter, semester, and annually. Part IV on Monitoring and Inspection provides forms for requesting and reporting budget obligations. Form No. 11 is the form for reporting on expenditures by semester.

Additionally, sections in two other handbooks provide details on financial and reporting responsibilities and procedures: the SBG Training Handbook for Pre-Primary and Primary School Principals, Vol. 1, November 2015, and the School Management Handbook, Vol. 1, for Primary School Principals, MoES, 2013. As part of state budget preparation, schools are required to submit budget and report expenditures to an oversight authority, particularly to the district authority. Then from the district, the budget and financial reporting will be reviewed and consolidated to the provincial and central levels. The SBG manual indicates relationships for reporting at different levels.

Accountability in school operations. In Lao PDR, accountability for compliance with school operations is guided by the Manual on Management and Utilization of the SBG and the School Management Handbook for Principals. These two documents outline the roles and responsibilities of school principals in school tasks and operations. They also outline the responsibilities of the school to report to an oversight authority (DESB), but the documents do not include rewards or consequences linked to the schools' operating performance. Schools, together with the VEDC and parents, assess school quality and needs for improvement. The School Development Plan and Budget Plan are

accessible documents that parents can use or refer to for assessing school performance. Other than the detailed guidelines provided through the manual and handbook, no separate policy is in place to incentivize improvement of school operations such as performance-based financing. Currently the SBG is allocated based on per capita, and the budget is usually determined according to schools’ needs and budget availability.

Learning accountability. Schools are generally required to coordinate with the community and parents to improve teaching, learning, and school management, but they are not specifically obliged to simplify and explain results to the public.

Pedagogical autonomy. The MoES outlines the curricula for every educational level and sector, including providing curricula, textbooks, teachers’ guides, and teaching aids to provinces, districts, and schools for implementation, according to Article 2.3.1 in the Implementation Guidelines on Deconcentration in Education.¹⁴ The PESS, DESB, and schools can then adapt up to 20 percent of the original contents of the curricula and textbooks to fit local situations. Educational management levels can also produce supplementary instructional materials. For non-core curriculum, the same flexibility applies. The local level can adapt 20 percent of the national curriculum for the local context. In addition to curricula and learning materials, some flexibility is also found in setting the school calendar. According to Article 2.5.2 of the Implementation Guidelines on Deconcentration in Education, the central MoES sets the school year, but districts can make adaptations to fit local needs as long as they cover the full curricula. This allows the PESS and DESBs to work around cultivating seasons and traditional festivals, as long as the curriculum is covered completely.

5. Accountability to stakeholders is EMERGING .		
Policy Action	Score	Justification
5A. Guidelines for the use of results of student assessments	Latent ●○○○	No guidelines are in place for the use of results of student assessments.
5B. Analysis of school and student performance	Latent ●○○○	There are no mandates for standardized assessment, comparative analysis of results, and dissemination of results.
5C. Degree of financial accountability at the central, regional, and school levels	Established ●●●○	All levels have requirements for financial compliance, transparency, and reporting. For the central level these include sanctions (fines) for noncompliance.
5D. Degree of accountability in school operations	Established ●●●○	Training manuals/guidelines outline the roles and responsibilities of school principals in school tasks/operations and for schools on reporting to oversight authorities.
5E. Degree of learning accountability	Latent ●○○○	There is no mandate for explaining results of student assessments to the public.

IV. Enhancing Education Quality: Policy Recommendations for Lao PDR

Evidence presented in the benchmarking section reveals that the MoES of Lao PDR has a well-developed policy framework to enable the Ministry to execute the school block grants. The three-build system articulates the roles of the central, provincial, district, and school levels. According to policy, schools under the direction of the principal and VEDC are supposed to carry out a school self-evaluation that informs their school development plans and helps

¹⁴ The English version is the Decree on Deconcentration in the Education Sector No. 1500/DOP.02, March 2002, Article 2.5.1.

to shape the annual operating budget plan submitted by each school to the DESB and up the line for consolidation to the PESS and central level for approval.

To ensure better learning outcomes through school-based management with accountability, Lao PDR could strengthen its SBM policies in a few key areas. Specific measures should be taken to strengthen the policy for devolving authority to the PESS and DESB for teaching and non-teaching staff appointments and for setting contractual staff salaries in line with local guidelines; composition, elections, and incentives for the Village Education Development Committees; stronger requirements for communicating school plans and school and student performance to the stakeholder community; and most critically, setting policy for standardized student assessment and using assessment results to identify areas for improvement and actionable next steps. Recommendations are provided by policy goal below.

1. Legal authority over planning and management of the school budget.

The current policy framework enables schools to participate in the planning and management of their operating budget, which is transferred to public schools through a school block grant calculated on a per capita basis. Given the strength of the enabling policies, it is recommended to continue to build capacity at the school and local levels of government so they can fully participate in budget planning and the school development plan process. To complement capacity building it is recommended to have a policy ensuring the communication of the amount of the school block grant to each school. This would not only facilitate better planning, but also inform the school community in a transparent manner and contribute to their ability to help government monitor the transfer and expenditure of funds at the school level.

Where the MoES may consider formally passing additional authority to the school level is in the case of determining salaries for contract teaching staff and non-teaching staff. Most teachers in Lao PDR are civil servants, and their salaries are governed by the authority of the MoES. Without calling for wide systemic changes, a feasible recommendation would be to establish a policy for the small percentage of contract teachers (non-civil servants) allowing schools in consultation with DESB, to set the pay in accordance with qualifications and locally established guidelines. This recommendation also would apply for non-teaching staff who are contracted outside of the civil service. This may include school counselors, aides, and cleaning and maintenance services. It would be a step to formalize a process that may already happen informally.

2. School autonomy in personnel management.

Policies supporting school autonomy in personnel management are at early stages and considered “emerging” since they are still highly centralized. Policy evidence shows that the central MoES appoints new teachers to the education system, and the PESS and DESB then have authority to deploy teachers to schools in their respective jurisdictions. It is recommended to provide authority to the provincial level to appoint teachers in accordance with the centrally established quota, qualifications framework, and salary structure. Additionally, to ease the bureaucratic process, it is recommended to provide the PESS (in coordination with the provincial level authority for the Ministry of Home Affairs) with the authority to appoint non-teaching staff based on the approved staffing plan submitted by the schools through the DESB. Non-teaching staff can be considered administrative personnel, school counselors, and support staff such as aides and cleaning and maintenance personnel.

Providing the authority to the provincial level eliminates the need to seek authorization at the level of the central ministry for these types of staffing decisions. It provides the school and district the ability to react in a timelier matter. The civil servant rules are in place and can be followed at the provincial or district level. Ideally, the hiring of non-teaching staff could also be further devolved to the district level in coordination with the school.

The policies currently in place for school principal appointment and deployment are already well developed. If the MoES were to improve upon them it could do so by considering providing some voice to the VEDC on its satisfaction

with the school principal's performance. At present, the policy establishes that the DESB and the PESS are involved in the evaluation process for principals, but there is no voice for the school level. The DESB should have clear guidelines for evaluation of principals and be able to have some voice in recommendation for principal tenure, transfer, and removal. Policy should also allow for authorities at the provincial level to have a voice or ability to recommend removal from service if performance is continually substandard after attempts to work with the school principal have failed.

3. Role of the VEDC or School Management Committee in school governance.

An overall recommendation is to continue to provide training and support to VEDCs and schools to build their capacity for quality school management. In general, the policy framework for participation of the VEDC in budget preparation, financial oversight, school activities, and learning inputs is well documented and supported by guidelines and manuals. Policy is weaker in terms of the VEDC's participation in personnel management and transparency in community participation.

The VEDC in some circumstances may have an informal voice regarding teacher performance at the school level. As a step toward strengthening the ability for parents to express their satisfaction with teacher needs or performance, it is recommended to establish policy that would provide the VEDC with a formal voice in requesting teacher transfer or requesting new teachers to fill unmet learning needs to the DESB.

As a first step to encouraging better communication with the wider community on the school's goals, needs, and plans, it is recommended to establish a policy that requires schools to hold at least two general assembly meetings with the school community each year. The first could be a simple meeting to convey the contents and goals of the school development plan that informs parents of the baseline and priorities for the school year. It may also be an appropriate time to call upon skills within the community to help assist the school in achieving their stated goals. The second meeting would ideally be later in the year to communicate results on achieving school improvement goals.

The VEDC membership is composed of representatives or heads of other committees who may or may not have an interest in the school's management. No access exists for community members or parents who want to be involved in school affairs and may not hold one of these positions. To ensure access for the general school community to serve as a VEDC member, it is recommended to consider an amendment to the VEDC handbook to allow for the general election of two or more VEDC positions by the community at large in addition to the traditionally appointed positions. It is also recommended to have term limits for these positions and perhaps to consider reviewing the VEDC handbook's requirements for the composition of the VEDC and their incentives, if the current composition is not motivated to perform their duties (see Box 3).

Box 3. Creating Effective School Management Committees: Country Examples

School Management Committees (SMCs) have the potential to improve student learning and school quality when they engage in the right kinds of activities. The Center for Public Education identifies five characteristics associated with effective SMCs.

- *Focus on Student Achievement.* Effective SMCs understand that student learning is the priority, and they focus their School Improvement Plans and activities on goals that help improve the quality of education and learning outcomes of children in school.
- *Allocate resources to needs.* These SMCs allocate available resources from school grants and their operating budget to focus on their student-learning priorities.
- *Are mindful of their own accountability to the community.* Effective SMCs routinely and regularly measure and report the return on investment of the education dollars they spend.
- *Use data whenever possible.* Effective SMCs track all available data about their schools through school report cards, student assessment scores, budget data, and any other data available and make this information available to the parents and communities they serve.
- *Engage the communities they serve.* Effective SMCs institutionalize parent and community involvement in policy-making and setting goals for the school (Ward and Griffin Jr 2005).

Composition of SMCs in Indonesia. SMCs in Indonesia are active with regular meetings throughout the year, and their activities have been seen to correlate with improved student learning outcomes, especially when the SMC coordinates with the local village council and democratically elects its members (Pradhan et al. 2011). A 2002 Ministerial Decree requires that each SMC have at least nine members, and these members must include representatives from parents, community leaders, education professionals, the private sector, teachers, community-based organizations, and village officials. The decree further requires that SMCs encourage a larger role for the community and that they seek to accommodate the aspirations of the community in their activities (World Bank 2011).

Targeted SMC Training and Improved Student Learning in Mexico. Targeted training for parents and the SMC on establishing learning goals for the school can be effective for improving student learning. Through Mexico's PEC Program (Quality Schools Program), parents play a key role in the composition and management of SMCs. PEC provided targeted training to SMCs on how to improve learning outcomes in their schools. This puts the school community's focus on learning and allows them to better support the teaching and learning efforts of the principal and teachers at the school (Wang et al. 2015). Increasing the responsibility of parents by involving them in the management of school grants made the most difference in lowering repetition and failure rates in comparison to control schools (Skoufias and Shapiro 2006; Gertler et al. 2006). Targeted training to parents in School Improvement Planning (SIP) and monitoring also significantly increased language and math scores (Lopez-Calva and Espinosa 2006; Arcia, Kattan, Patrinos and Rivera-Olvera 2013).

4. School and student assessment.

The MoES has established a high-level policy mandating schools to be assessed annually. Currently, documents that guide the process consist of a handbook and guidelines for SBG, and a cascade of training has been taking place between the three-build levels. To strengthen the ability of school self-assessment to have the intended effects, the MoES could consider building a stronger policy framework with dedicated funding to outline the district and provincial level roles, particularly in using information from school self-assessment to provide support to schools in critical areas to improve learning.

For standardized student assessment, no current policy is in place in Lao PDR at any level—national, provincial, or district—for collecting data on student performance at primary and secondary. In the past, RIES has carried out a standardized test (ASLO) for grades 3 and 5 but only on an ad hoc basis when supported by donor partner resources. RIES stated they were working toward establishing a policy and supporting resources for national standardized

testing starting with grade 3. It is highly recommended that in parallel to working with UNICEF on the piloting of Lao PDR's application of the ASEAN regional standardized assessment, that the MoES develop a policy for their own national standardized student assessment and work toward establishing financial resources for regular assessment of grade 3 on a sample basis, even if just every few years rather than annually. The policy could then help to shape how partners in coordination with Lao PDR would support national standardized assessment on a regular basis that is comparable across years. While crafting this policy it would be important to include within the policy framework a directive on publishing aggregated results on student assessment and making those results available to education stakeholders and the public.

Within the education system, it is also recommended to work with provinces and districts since there is capacity and practice in place to strengthen policy for standardized assessment at these levels and mandate comparative analysis, dissemination of summary data, and analysis to the public in a format that can be understood by school stakeholders.

Another step is to build upon instruments already in place such as the school self-assessment report to convey student performance information to school stakeholders. Global evidence shows that reporting on student assessment results can have motivational effects for improving student learning (Box 4).

Box 4: Sharing Test Scores in Pakistan

In the Punjab Province of Pakistan, researchers sought to measure the impact of providing families with information about their child's test scores and about the test scores in other schools of the village. The evaluation found that giving parents information led to improved test scores and higher primary school enrollment. The results indicate that when parents know how well their children are doing in school—and know how well other children are doing in different schools—it can spur better learning.

Parents received the test scores in the form of a "report card" at a school meeting, during which the information was explained and parents were told what helps improve test scores. Every meeting started with a 30-minute open discussion on what can influence test scores, including the teacher, the school environment, the home environment and the child's own behavior. Presenters were careful not to offer advice to parents or blame their children for a poor test score. A year later, the process was repeated. Students in government schools whose parents received information on test scores were doing better on the tests a year later when compared with students in villages where families did not get the report cards. The gain was the same regardless of whether the government school was ranked as high performing or not before the evaluation was launched. This result is interesting because it shows that providing information motivates local stakeholders, including parents, students, and schools, to try harder. (Andrabi et al. 2007)

5. Accountability to stakeholders.

To accompany the policy framework on standardized student assessment (for national, provincial, and district levels), it is recommended to establish guidelines on how to use student performance results to identify areas for improvement and actionable steps at different levels of the education system including schools.

As the MoES continues to build its national assessment framework and quality assurance guidelines, it is recommended to include a policy to simplify and explain the results of student assessment to the public in a way that is easily understood by a nontechnical audience. For provincial-, district-, or school-level student assessment, it is also recommended to package student assessment results using a simple, easy to understand format. This could be presented in a school-level report card.

It is recommended to build on instruments already in place such as the school self-assessment report to convey student performance information to school stakeholders. The results of the school self-evaluation could take the form of a simple school report and feed into an annual school report card compiled by the VEDC and shared with the DESB as well as the wider community (see Box 5).

In contrast to the lack of policy on student assessment and sharing of student performance data, the MoES does have a well-established policy and requirements for reporting on school block grant expenditures and financing of the education system from schools through district, provincial, and central levels. Requirements are also in place for following educational operating procedures.

As an incentive for schools, it may be worth considering establishing a policy that recognizes schools that are in good compliance with school operating procedures and have shown progress in achieving their stated improvement goals. This does not have to be a monetary reward but could take the form of recognition at the district level.

Box 5: School Report Cards

School report cards can be an effective tool for monitoring and communication at the school level and beyond if they are kept simple and direct and if there is capacity to use them. School report cards can be a useful method for disseminating information to school-level stakeholders so that they can better understand the following:

- The criteria for assessing performance
- The performance of the school from year to year and in relation to other schools in the education system
- The actions that may need to be taken to improve performance.

Used in this way, school report cards engage parents and the community and build a partnership in demand for better results and solutions for reaching the intended outcomes.

Paraná State in Brazil undertook an accountability program and collected school-level information for each school to generate individual school report cards. The stated goals of the initiative were to increase parental knowledge about the quality of instruction in schools, and to raise parents' voice in school matters at the school council and state levels. The initiative also aimed to increase awareness among school personnel about their schools' instructional quality and academic performance. The report cards were relatively simple three-page documents that included the following information:

- Test-based performance (grade 4 and 8 test scores)
- Student flows (promotion, retention, and dropout rates)
- School characteristics (average class size and teachers' qualifications)
- Parental opinion and satisfaction with several aspects of the school (facilities, security, teaching practices, quality of education, and parental involvement)
- Parental opinion on the availability of information on school performance and activities (Bruns et al. 2011).

The report cards also included comparative information on the performance of neighboring schools. The report cards were published in a newsletter and widely disseminated. Parents and communities were easily able to access them and engage in discussions with teachers and school officials about how they might improve the quality of their schools.

Sources: Wang et al 2015; Bruns et al 2011.

Acknowledgments

This report was prepared by Angela Demas (Senior Education Specialist and Task Team Leader, World Bank). Phouvanh Phommalangsy (Education Specialist) contributed the background section on education in Lao PDR and worked closely with Emiko Naka (Education Consultant) in the data collection process. The team was also supported by Mary Breeding (Education Consultant), who contributed to the data reviews and data collection. Written comments were also provided by Dr. Mithong Souvanvisay (Director General, DPPE), Mr. Chandy Phommabouth (Director General, DTT), Mr. Kadam Vongdeuane (Deputy Director of Research Center Department of Planning), and Amer Hasan (Senior Economist, World Bank). The author is grateful to the Ministry of Education and Sports for their input, support, and validation of policy data and recommendations. Data cited in this report are based on reviews of official laws, regulations, decrees, and other policy documents. The research and resulting SABER SAA Country Report for Lao PDR was carried out to inform the work of the Second Global Partnership for Education Project that focuses on school-based management under the leadership of Plamen Danchev (TTL and Senior Education Specialist) and the guidance of the Education Cooperation Unit of the MoES led by Khampaseuth Kitignavong (Head of Office and Deputy Director General, Department of Primary Education). For further information on the SABER Initiative and SABER SAA, see <http://saber.worldbank.org/index.cfm>.

Acronyms

ASLO	Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
DESB	District Education and Sports Bureau
DOF	Department Of Finance
EFA	Education For All
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
EQS	Education Quality Standard
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
ESQAC	Education Standards and Quality Assurance Centre
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Pedagogical Advisor
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PESS	Provincial Education and Sports Services
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPA	Pupil-Parent Association
RIES	Research Institute for Educational Science
SAA	School Autonomy and Accountability
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SBG	School Block Grant
SBM	School-Based Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDP	School Development Plan
SMC	School Management Committee
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
VEDC	Village Education Development Committee

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This report focuses specifically on policies in the area of School Autonomy and Accountability.

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