



Policy Goals

Status

1. School Autonomy in Budget Planning and Approval.

Schools have autonomy over non-salary expenditures, and their budget management plans feed up to the Educational Service Area (ESA) level. Education budgets are decentralized at the ESA and to continue to the Local Administrative Organization level. The administrative systems are in place and well established



2. School Autonomy in Personnel Management.

Teachers are hired at the ESA level, but following the Teacher's Civil Service Commission rules. The selection process is bureaucratic and schools have little influence over their personnel choices. There is limited scope for implementing a system for managing teacher incentives



3. Participation of the School Council in School Finance

Parents participate in school board committees and play a strong advisory role at the local level, and also contribute in fundraising activities. Parents contribute up to 30 percent of total per student expenditure in public schools, and the private sector another 10 percent. Parent and private donations are not registered in the school budget



4. Assessment of School and Student Performance.

The Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) is an independently run public organization that manages the periodic evaluations of school performance. The National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS) is responsible for standardized testing in basic and secondary education. National test scores and rankings are publicized and used in education policy and private results are available to students and parents.



5. School Accountability

School boards can request the office of the Auditor General to perform financial audits. School performance and learning outcomes are regularly made public. Still, school accountability is hampered by the lack of power of parents over school personnel and for the weak linkages between student performance and teacher and school accountability.



Education in Thailand

Education in Thailand is regulated by the Education Act of 1999, which establishes that it is compulsory for all children to attend school for nine years—six years of primary plus three years of lower secondary (Table 1). The system is divided in 185 Education Service Areas (ESA) in 76 Provinces. Each ESA is responsible for approximately 200 schools, each covering between 300,000 to 500,000 students. Universal completion of secondary education is one of the main goals. School-life expectancy is 12.3 years of education, which means that, on average, all students should finish secondary school (UNESCO (2011)).

Age	Grade	Level of Education	
3-5	Pre-Elementary	Pre-Primary	
6-11	1-6	Primary	
12-14	7-9	Lower Secondary	
15-17	10-12	Upper Secondary	Lower vocational & technical education
18-21	13-16	Undergraduate	Tertiary vocational
22+	17+	Graduate studies	

Source: Ministry of Education

The gross enrollment rate for primary school is above 100 percent, and the transition rate from primary to secondary schools is above 90 percent. In 2007 there were more than 5 million children enrolled in primary education and more than 2.5 million in secondary education. In addition, more than 1 million children attended vocational education (IBE 2011). Still, full coverage in basic education is not complete due to inaccessibility of some areas, and lower school access among the poor.

The government spent about 493 billion Baht in education in 2013 (\$15.3 billion), which represents 3.9 percent of GDP and 20.6 percent of the government's budget (Table 2). Starting in 2002, school finances and school administration have been decentralized at the Education Service Area level. The ESA receives the

transfers from the Ministry of Finance and distributes the funds to the Local Administration Organization (LOA) or directly to the schools.

Public expenditure on education:	
As % of GDP	3.9
As % of total government expenditure	20.6
Distribution of public expenditure per level (%) - 2009:	
Pre-primary	7.3
Primary	50.2
Secondary	16.7
Tertiary	17.0
Unknown	8.8

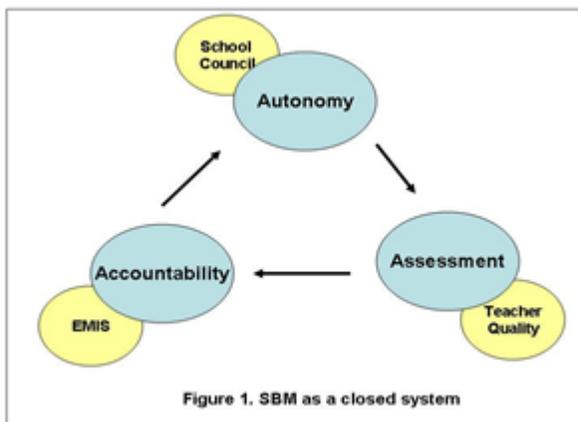
Source: Budget in Brief Bureau of Budget, Office of the Prime Minister. Pre-primary, primary, and secondary figures are prorated using the percentages for 2009.

Primary and secondary curricula are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, with some modifications allowed at the local level. Student learning is assessed in all grades using non-standardized testing, with four assessment levels: excellent, good, pass, and fail and standardized testing is done in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12. In the year 2000 Thailand created the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), which is in charge of developing methods and criteria for assessing schools. Student learning is assessed by the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), which administers yearly examinations using two different types of standardized tests known as the Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET) and an advanced version called A-NET. Discussions about student performance almost always revolve around O-NET results.

Thailand participates in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) rounds. Test results from O-NETS, TIMSS and PISA are invoked regularly in public debate about Thailand's educational performance.

The Case for School Autonomy and School Accountability

School autonomy and accountability are key components to ensure education 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 (Fig. 1). Benchmarking and monitoring the policy goals of school autonomy and accountability allows for a rapid assessment of Thailand's education system, setting the stage for improving policy planning and implementation.



School autonomy is a form of education decentralization in which school personnel are in charge of making most managerial decisions, frequently in partnerships 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 for developing common goals, increased mutual commitment to student learning, and a more efficient use of scarce school resources. By allowing more local control over school operations, SAA fosters a new social contract between parents and teachers by improving communication and increasing local cooperation and local accountability. To be effective, school autonomy must function within a compatible set of incentives that take into account the education policies in the country and the incentives for their implementation. Moreover, locating the managerial responsibilities at the school level automatically implies that the school also has to be accountable to its local stakeholders and to national and local authorities. Still, the empirical evidence from

education systems where schools enjoy managerial autonomy is that it has been beneficial for restoring the social contract between parents and the school, and that it has been instrumental in setting in motion policies aimed at improving student learning.

The experience from high performing countries—as measured by their performance in international tests such as PISA—indicates that:

- Education systems where schools had more autonomy over teaching content and student assessment tended to perform better on the PISA test;
- Education systems where schools have more autonomy over resource allocation and that also publish test results performed better than schools with less autonomy;
- Education systems in which many schools competed for students did not systematically get better PISA results;
- Education systems with standardized student assessment tended to do better than those without standardized student assessment; and
- PISA scores among schools with students from different social backgrounds differed less in education systems that use standardized student assessments than in systems that did not.

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

There are five policy goals of school autonomy and accountability that can help benchmark school autonomy and accountability:

- School autonomy in budget planning and approval
- School autonomy in personnel management
- The participation of the school council in school finance
- The assessment of school and student performance

- School accountability to stakeholders

Each of these policy goals has a set of policy actions that make it possible to judge how far along each school is in the process of implementing each policy goal. Each policy goal and corresponding actions are scored on the basis of its status and the results classified as Latent, Emerging, Established, or Advanced. A Latent score indicates that the policy behind the indicator is not yet in place. An Emerging score indicates that the implementation of the program or policy is in progress. An Established score indicates that the program or policy is in operation and meets the minimum standards. An Advanced score indicates that the program or policy is in operation and reflects best practice.

Thailand’s Performance: A Summary of Results from the Benchmarking Exercise

Thailand is implementing education reforms with the clear objective of improving the quality of education and to be on par with high performing countries in the world. Budgetary autonomy is **established** since the management of non-salary funds functions well, but non-salary transfers are slightly regressive. Autonomy in personnel management is **latent**. Teacher management is highly centralized and schools cannot select teachers or address teacher incentives. Parent participation in school finance is **established**, although school boards have no legal authority over personnel choices. Student assessment is **advanced**, with regular standardized testing done in the 6th and 9th grades with safeguards that ensure integrity measuring and reporting of results. Accountability is **established**, since it is good at the administrative level but with some gaps in teacher accountability.

School autonomy in budget planning and approval is established

The objective of this policy goal is to determine the degree of autonomy that schools have in planning and managing their budgets and personnel. For policy intent the rubric makes clear which areas should be backed by laws, regulations, or official rules already 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. At the *Advanced* end this means that school administrators may receive a cash transfer that is deposited into the school’s bank account, disburse payments to teaching and non-teaching staff; pay suppliers of goods and services, and manage the school flow of funds. At the *Latent* stage the school may not manage any money because the Ministry of Education or the local government sends goods directly to the school and pays for all services directly, without any intervention by the school in process.

Currently Thai schools have complete autonomy over non-salary expenditures. These expenditures reflect the school’s own management plan, which feeds up to the Educational Service Area level. The implementation of budgetary autonomy is still in progress. So far, budgets are decentralized to the level of Education Service Area, although they are increasingly being decentralized to the Local Administrative Organization level. The administrative systems are in place and well established.

School autonomy in budget planning and approval is <i>Established</i>		
Indicator	Score	Justification
Does the school principal have legal authority to manage its operational budget?	Established ●●●○	School principals have the legal authority to manage the funds allocated at the central and municipal levels.
Does the school principal have legal authority to set and manage staff and teacher salaries?	Latent ●○○○	All salaries are set and managed centrally by the Ministry of Education
Does the school principal have the legal authority to raise other funds in addition to the transfers received from national or local governments?	Established ●●●○	School principal can raise additional funds from national and sub-national governments, from the private sector, and from non-governmental institutions.

School autonomy in personnel management is Latent

This indicator refers to the level of autonomy that the school has in the everyday management of personnel at the school level.

Teacher management has been recently decentralized. Now teachers are hired at the Education Service Area level, but following the Teacher's Civil Service Commission rules, which tend to protect teachers from schools. The selection process, however, is based on compliance of curricular requirements, such as the completion of a university degree, and without provision for more local control over teachers. Because the selection process is bureaucratic, rather than selective on the basis of quality, schools have little influence over their personnel choices. Moreover, since teacher salaries are regulated by Civil Service rules, there is limited scope for implementing a system of rewards and sanctions that could improve teacher incentives. The validation process also indicated that autonomy in teacher selection at the school level must be reinforced with substantial reforms in teacher training policies that would yield better teacher training and a rising of the standards associated with the teaching profession.

School autonomy in personnel management is Latent		
Indicator	Score	Justification
Are decisions to hire and fire teachers managed by the school principal?	Emerging ●○○○	Hiring and firing decisions are managed centrally or at the Education Service Area as per civil service rules
Do school councils (which may include the school principal) have the legal authority to hire and fire teachers?	Latent ●○○○	School councils do not have a legal standing in hiring and firing decisions
Do school councils have the legal authority to hire and fire the school principal?	Latent ●○○○	Principals are hired and fired centrally

Participation of the school council in school finance is Established

The participation of the council in school administration is very important because it is where parents can exercise their real power as clients of the education system. If the council has to cosign payments, then it has purchasing power automatically. The use of an 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 detailed operation manuals by the School Council is also a good vehicle for increased accountability and for the institutionalization of autonomy.

Parents participate in school board committees, which have a strong advisory role at the local level, and also contribute in fundraising activities. Since schools are responsible for drawing their own plans for managing non-salary resources, the role of parents in financial planning is very important. Currently, parents contribute between 20 and 30 percent of the total per student expenditure in public schools (UNESCO 2009) and another 10 percent is donated by the private sector following the lead of parents. Although parent participation is significant, current policies force schools to keep two sets of books in order to manage a combined budget of government and private funds. This practice brings problems of operational efficiency and transparency.

Participation of the School Council in School Finance is Established		
Indicator	Score	Justification
Does the school council assist the school principal in the preparation of the school budget?	Emerging ●●○○	School Councils have a voice on non-salary expenses at the school level but the principal is responsible for the final budget
Do school councils have the legal authority to approve the school budget?	Emerging ●●○○	School Councils may be consulted but approval of the official budget is done at the municipal level.
Is there a manual or set of instructions describing the participation of the school councils in the preparation of the school budget?	Established ●●●○	Schools Council have manuals regulating their roles and responsibilities in the preparation of the budget
Do school councils have the legal authority to supervise the implementation of the school budget?	Established ●●●○	Schools Council has legal means to review the implementation of the school budget, but has no direct obligation to do so.
If school councils participate in the preparation and approval of the school budget is this budget used as an input in the general budget prepared by the Ministry of Education?	Established ●●●○	National and sub-national authorities use these budgets as their main input for the final transfer of resources to the school

Assessment of school and student performance is Advanced

School assessments can have a big impact on school performance because it forces 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.

In Thailand school and student assessments are independent of the Ministry of Education. Schools are assessed every five years by a team of evaluators employed by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), which is a public agency external to the Ministry of Education. The main objective of the ONESQA assessments is to measure school quality without passing judgment on the education institutions in regards to rewards or sanctions. ONESQA contracts out the assessments to private third parties that are accredited in advance. Student assessment is the responsibility of the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS) a public agency also external to the Ministry of Education. NIETS administers the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET), a standardized achievement test for grades 6, 9, and 12 in eight subject areas. In 2012 about 950,000 students took the O-NET in the 6th grade, 880,000 in the 9th grade, and 330,000 in the 12th grade. In addition, NIETS administers the Advanced National Education Test (A-NET), an advanced standardized test given to 3rd and 6th grade students. Local school systems administer their own tests to students in the 2nd, 5th, and 8th grades.

Thailand also participates in TIMSS and PISA. The results for TIMSS in 2003 and in PISA in 2009 indicate that Thailand needs to improve its educational performance drastically to be on par with the higher performing countries in East Asia.

School and student assessment is Advanced		
Policy Action	Score	Justification
Do schools perform yearly assessments of school and student performance?	Advanced ●●●●	Schools have yearly assessment of student performance implemented by an independent agency. Schools are assessed every five years.
Do schools use the student assessments for making administrative or pedagogical decisions aimed at improving school and student performance?	Advanced ●●●●	Schools use the yearly assessments to track the impact of short and long term administrative and pedagogical adjustments on school and student performance
Do schools perform yearly assessments of learning outcomes using standardized tests?	Advanced ●●●●	Assessments are standardized and comparable from year to year
Are the results of standardized tests used for making administrative or pedagogical decisions aimed at improving school and student performance?	Advanced ●●●●	Schools use the results to track the impact of short and long term administrative and pedagogical adjustments on school and student performance
Are the results of the assessment of school and student performance made public to parents?	Advanced ●●●●	Assessments are made public with comparisons made with similar schools and with previous years

School accountability to stakeholders is Established

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 the school, and the measurement of learning outcomes are all aimed to reinforce accountability. Only by being

accountable to parents can education quality be sustainable. The following indicators address the aspects of accountability that can be implemented within the framework of school-based management.

The ranking of this indicator may be somewhat optimistic because it tends to place most of the emphasis on the reporting of learning outcomes. School boards do not have direct legal authority to ask for financial audits to enforce financial transparency and accountability, but can request the office of the Auditor General to perform one. Still, school accountability is hampered by the lack of power of parents over staffing decisions, which can be a very important factor in improving learning.

School accountability is Established		
Policy Action	Score	Justification
Is there a manual regulating how the school council can use the results of the yearly assessments of school and student performance?	Emerging ●●○○	School Councils have guidelines for using the assessments, but recommendations do not include personnel actions
Is the school's assessment of school and student performance part of a national or regional assessment system?	Advanced ●●●●	Assessments are components of a national system operated by an independent agency with a long term plan for the use of the results
Does the school use the assessments to compare school performance with schools in similar conditions?	Established ●●●○	Assessments results are made public at the school level and comparisons are often made with other countries.
Do school councils have the legal authority to hire external auditors to carry out financial audits at the school?	Emerging ●●○○	School councils can only request an audit from the Auditor General. Requests are always honored.
Is there a manual to guide the school council in how to use financial audits to evaluate school performance?	Advanced ●●●●	School Councils have a manual for guiding them in the use of external financial audits in school accountability

From Analysis to Action: Policy Options for Thailand

Thailand has made substantial progress in improving education access and in bringing up the need to improve education quality and student learning, but more progress can be made to improve autonomy and accountability policies. The proper functioning of ONESQA and NIETS and the efforts at improving operational autonomy at the school level are key conditions for improving education sector performance. However, more autonomy in personnel management and in the establishments of policies directly linked to teacher and school accountability are needed.

To ensure that all the conditions are set for improving education quality and learning Thailand needs to reflect on the benchmarking results, which suggest that:

1. There is an urgent need to **implement personnel autonomy and to make teachers more accountable**. To ensure that improvements in teacher quality are sustainable there is a need to give schools more autonomy in the selection and retention of teachers, more autonomy in the linking of performance to tenure, and the linking of personnel autonomy to teacher incentives, including salaries. Teacher selection by schools should follow more stringent standards for new entrants, and to make the licensing exams much more demanding and less pro-forma. High performing countries that have civil service rules for teachers invested most of their efforts in selecting teachers from the best pool of talent in the country, which meant the establishment of salaries that are competitive with the salaries of well-paid professions in exchange for stricter recruitment processes. However, this approach takes many years to mature. In the meantime, an alternative is to make teachers more accountable to schools and parents and that accountability is only possible if the hiring and firing of teachers can be done at the school level.

2. **Deepen budgetary autonomy** to allow schools to manage all of its funds, including teacher salaries. The experience so far seems to be positive with schools being able to administer the budgets assigned by their respective ESA. The current oversight role by the school boards and the community should help create a social contract between teachers and parents and help establish the sense of trust that is necessary to move to the high performing stage of countries like Finland and Korea, where teachers are well selected, have the respect of the community and, in exchange, they do their best to improve student learning.

Indicators of School Autonomy and Accountability in Thailand and East Asia

Economy	Budget autonomy	Personnel autonomy	Participation	Assessment	Accountability	Overall
China	Established ●●●○	Emerging ●●○○	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○
Hong Kong SAR, China	Established ●●●○	Advanced ●●●●	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○
Indonesia	Established ●●●○	Emerging ●●○○	Established ●●●○	Advanced ●●●●	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○
Japan	Established ●●●○	Emerging ●●○○	Latent ●○○○	Emerging ●●○○	Emerging ●●○○	Emerging ●●○○
Rep. of Korea	Established ●●●○	Latent ●○○○	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○	Emerging ●●○○	Emerging ●●○○
Singapore	Established ●●●○	Latent ●○○○	Advanced ●●●●	Advanced ●●●●	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○
Thailand	Established ●●●○	Latent ●○○○	Established ●●●○	Advanced ●●●●	Established ●●●○	Established ●●●○
Vietnam	Established ●●●○	Latent ●○○○	Latent ●○○○	Established ●●●○	Emerging ●●○○	Emerging ●●○○

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The Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) initiative collects data on the policies and institutions of education systems around the world and benchmarks them against practices associated with student learning. SABER aims to give all parties with a stake in educational results—from students, administrators, teachers, and parents to policymakers and business people—an accessible, detailed, objective snapshot of how well the policies of their country's education system are oriented toward ensuring that all children and youth learn.

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

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