EDUCATION BRIEF: MENA Country Experiences with School Report Cards and Accountability Mechanisms

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This brief summarizes the main findings of a stocktaking exercise conducted by the SABER School Autonomy and Accountability (SAA) team with inputs from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Education team. The purpose of the exercise was to find out which countries had made efforts to institute accountability mechanisms for delivery of quality education and to identify motivations, purposes, strengths, and gaps of ongoing school accountability initiatives (in particular, school report cards) in the region. A willingness of governments to increase school autonomy has sparked interest in a wide spectrum of accountability systems. Some initiatives are quite sophisticated and expensive (Dubai), others are modest and low-cost (Kuwait), some are at the initial stages (Morocco), and others are deepening their programs developing a robust school accountability system (Jordan).

In countries where decentralization reforms have been introduced, school autonomy coupled with strengthened accountability for learning results has assumed a key role to ensure education quality. To work adequately, this scheme requires that information about the quality of individual schools is available to end users (students, parents, communities) and/or education authorities. School data including inputs, processes and outcomes can then be used to increase transparency, assess school performance, provide the necessary support for effective school based-management and increase parental participation and school choice. The goal of School Report Card and other forms of school accountability is to encourage school actors to focus on key indicators and improve students learning (Cameron et al 2006). In other words, School Report Cards are essential tools to inform and engage stakeholders to demand better quality of education for their children (Florez 2012).

Among the five MENA country’s school accountability initiatives that were reviewed, most have referred to their initiatives as school reports or social accountability tools rather than school report cards. They have all developed a ‘report’ that says ‘something about the performance of the school’. The targeted audiences of the report cards and their accessibility vary considerably. For instance, school reports are made public and use ‘school rankings/ratings’ in Dubai and Jordan while in Kuwait school reports are only available for stakeholders at the school level, mainly school principals and vice-principals.

The countries studied usually tie the school report cards, or equivalent, to a set of education quality standards. In this respect, the main objective of school accountability initiatives is to help improve the quality of education by providing information on school performance to different education stakeholders and/or the general public. The nature and scope of the reports vary considerably, but they usually include school results and in many cases also inputs and processes (see Annex 1). The contents of the school reports are aligned with the country’s main motivation for creating the school report (i.e. public accountability, school diagnostic, catalyst for increased parental participation). They also take into account the country characteristics including the education system’s level of decentralization and the capacity and depth of their Education Management Information Systems. Some reports are comprehensive while others are quite simple. Dubai and Jordan have developed school reports that include a wide range of quantitative and qualitative information including basic school administrative data (enrollment, attendance, dropout, etc.), students’ academic and socioemotional achievement, school
safety, teachers’ quality and school improvement plans to name a few. On the other hand, Kuwait has
developed a very simple instrument providing the school with performance results on the regional student
assessment exam.

There are different approaches to accountability in the region and they vary according to the underlying
motivation behind the school reports. Some accountability tools are developed at the central level and
take a top down approach, others have emerged from the grass-roots or school level, and others have
combined the two approaches (Table 1). Dubai and Kuwait school report initiatives, come from the central
Ministries of Education, while in Jordan a mixed approach combines a design that pulls information from
two sources, the central education management information system at the MoE and the well-established,
locally developed School Improvement Plans (SIPs). Morocco’s accountability initiative emerges from the
civil society. Local NGOs are promoting a bottom-up initiative with the underlying motivation of promoting
social accountability to voice community concerns about school performance. In Dubai the central
government is seeking a coherent accountability mechanism to oversee a decentralized, complex, diverse,
and mainly private education system.

Table 1: Different Approaches to the Design of School Report Cards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type of School Report / Accountability Mechanism</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Primary Purpose</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom-Up</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Local school report</td>
<td>School and community</td>
<td>Promote social accountability to improve quality and performance of primary schools.</td>
<td>Focus groups and surveys to principals, teachers, parents, and students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Combination (but mostly top-down)</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>External School Assessment (based on education quality standards)</td>
<td>Central MoE, Schools, General Public</td>
<td>Public and professional accountability</td>
<td>Administrative data, SIPs, surveys, classroom observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-Down</td>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>Regional Student Achievement Report Template</td>
<td>School Management/Leadership team</td>
<td>School diagnostic and instructional leadership</td>
<td>Regional Education Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-Down</td>
<td>Dubai, UAE</td>
<td>School quality report</td>
<td>Knowledge &amp; Human Development Authority, schools, parents, public.</td>
<td>Provide information, promote transparency on quality of schools to foster competition and improve service delivery/ outcomes.</td>
<td>Annual External School Inspection Reports, surveys to local stakeholders, classroom observation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An interesting difference among school accountability systems in the region, is the support that the
schools receive for interpreting data and using the school reports. In the case of Kuwait, basic school report
information (mainly regional test results) is accompanied by a considerable amount of capacity building activities for school directors, school administrators and teachers. In contrast, Dubai schools
receive very little support from the government to improve mainly because most of the schools are private schools and are expected to invest in school improvement activities on their own. Their motivation for investment is based on the knowledge that informed parents have choices and will send their children to high performing schools.

There is some qualitative/anecdotal evidence that shows that school accountability initiatives in the region have strengthened school-based management and influenced the improvement of parental/community participation at the school level (Kuwait, Halabi 2014). In other cases (Dubai) the school accountability initiative has led to better performing schools. The Dubai 2016 inspection report shows that 51 percent of students are now in good and outstanding schools, up from 30 percent in 2008. Yet, there is no rigorous evidence of the impact of these initiatives on students learning.

Country Summaries

Dubai, UAE

Within the United Arab Emirates, the emirate of Dubai has developed a publically-available school reporting system to measure and monitor school performance based on Dubai’s education quality standards, which also line up with the recently introduced UAE National Agenda Parameter (June 2015). The overarching objective of this reporting system is improving school quality by providing information to school stakeholders in the community. Promoting transparency about the quality of schools is expected to foster competition and drive improvements in service delivery/education outcomes. The system uses a comprehensive framework in order to be able to inspect all the different kinds of private schools in the city state (there are 16 different curricula available). School inspections are conducted once a year by regional and international inspectors focusing on 10 different aspects of the school, among others: learning, social aspects and school management. The results of these expensive inspections are published in the annual External School Inspection Reports which include the validation of a school’s self-assessments, surveys to parents and students, school staff interviews, classroom observations, review of students work and classification. The reports are publicly available and the Emirate has even developed a phone app. to disseminate the information from the school reports.

Jordan

In recent years, Jordan has been working on the development of a national accountability system to improve the quality of education. In January 2016, the Ministry of Education (MOE) created the Education Quality and Accountability Unit (EQUA). The Unit’s mandate is to drive improvement in schools through the design and implementation of external school assessments based on the newly created quality education standards. The idea is that each school undertakes a thorough school assessment once a year. The EQUA is now hiring and training a cadre of school assessors to: (a) spend a week in each school collecting data on the quality education indicators and; (b) produce a comprehensive school report that
can be easily compared to other schools. The main audience for the school reports will be the central MOE; however, the reports will also be available to the school and the general public.

Kuwait

Kuwait has focused its efforts on providing the necessary professional development to school actors, particularly principals and vice-principals, to undertake a sound diagnostic of their schools to help identify and overcome the main challenges faced at the school level. Instructional leadership standards have been developed to ensure that school principals use the available information, in particular regional student assessment results, to improve the quality of education at their schools. As part of this effort, a student achievement report template has been developed by the MOE and is distributed to each school. This report is quite simple and only provides students’ academic achievement information at the regional level. It does not allow for school-to-school comparisons and it is not meant to be public. It is only used to train school leaders in the use of data for decision-making, community engagement and school-based management (SBM). Qualitative evidence suggests that school leadership practices have improved in the schools that have received the instructional leadership training.

Morocco

Morocco is pursuing a grass-roots initiative to promote social accountability at the school level. The LEAD project is the first experience on social accountability in the education sector, as a result of a partnership of two NGOs, Care International Morocco (CIM) and Near East Foundation (NEF), a grantee of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability. CIM had developed the project SCORE, with funds of the Civil Society Fund of the World Bank, that developed a pilot of a citizen report card on a smaller scale in the commune of Dar Bouazza in Casablanca, Morocco. These local NGOs are working to create an accountability tool to allow parents and schools to communicate concerns about their students’ education/schools to education officials. The instrument includes focus groups and surveys of school principals, teachers, parents and students and will be piloted in 50 schools. The outcome of this instrument will be a school report to be shared with local community stakeholders. It is expected that this bottom-up accountability approach is linked to the Government’s Program on School Improvement Plans and an advocacy campaign for regional and national levels.

References

General:


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Jordan:
Background information on the School Development Program. Available at http://www.erfke.ca/en/content/school-development-program-0


Kuwait:

Morocco:


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