

# Evaluating Schools to Improve School Management and the Quality of Education

## HIGHLIGHTS

- A publicly available school rating system allows parents to better compare schools, empowering them to choose the best school for their children.
- A holistic approach to school quality improvement replaces piecemeal approaches.



## Development Challenge

Schools and education authorities in developing countries often lack the skills and resources to systematically monitor, evaluate, communicate, and subsequently improve the quality of the education they provide to children. Hence, parents have little way of knowing which schools are best and rely on proxy measures, such as a school’s physical facilities. According to UNESCO, more than 125 million children worldwide do not achieve minimum standards of numeracy and literacy, despite completing four years of primary school.

## Business Model

Providers of school evaluation and management support services assess school quality and learning outcomes using multiple data-based indicators, such as grade-level tests and comparisons of attendance and enrollment figures, to generate school ratings or student report cards. They work with schools to develop and implement whole school improvement plans that focus on school leadership, learning outcomes, financial and staff management, long-term planning, monitoring, and community relations. The goal is to improve learning outcomes, empower parents to better decide on the best schools for their children, and help school management improve the quality of the education they provide.

Services are typically offered by education-focused NGOs, as one element of their project portfolios, although some for-profit enterprises, such as Gray Matters India, are also active. Providers conduct school evaluations and offer advisory services and school management consultancy to private schools in return for fees, or to public schools under public-private partnership arrangements funded by donors.

## Features of School Evaluation Business Model



## Implementation: Delivering Value to the Poor

### Awareness

Providers share and publicize the results of their evaluations to advocate for school evaluation as a means of improving accountability and quality. They use various platforms for this purpose, including their websites, published detailed reports, conferences, and events to engage relevant stakeholders. Organizations with large education portfolios and networks of partners leverage their partnerships to promote evaluation services.

### Acceptance

Evaluation and school improvement is a participatory process, which facilitates acceptance of these initiatives. Students, staff, governing bodies, and parents all provide inputs. Although providers prescribe remedies, schools discuss and ratify action plans. Self-evaluation tools allow schools to build their professional capacity and take greater ownership of the process.

### Accessibility

Many organizations secure government recognition and/or adoption of their solutions. They collaborate with education authorities to affect large numbers of schools by rolling out district-level interventions. Self-evaluation instruments build schools' capacity, allowing better access to school information for parents. For instance, CfBT in India trains schools on School Self Reviews and the GMSA Foundation in South Africa has made its Whole School Self-Evaluation instrument freely available online.

### Affordability

Fee-charging consultancy providers such as Gray Matters India and CfBT in India and ITA in Pakistan offer stand-alone services as well as school improvement plans, which they cross-subsidize depending on contracts with individual schools. Providers try to restrict their school action plans to the most pressing needs and avoid recommending large investments, focusing instead on optimizing the use of existing resources. Lwannunda Community Development Initiative in Uganda, for example, trains district education officers to collect school data.

School evaluators typically follow a four-phase approach:

- Collection of data on standardized indicators, including student and teacher tests, classroom observations, management interviews, infrastructure audits, and parent satisfaction surveys.
- Data analysis to generate school performance diagnostics, recommendations, and school report cards or ratings.
- Crafting of action plans, which are presented to school management and other stakeholders, followed by formulation and implementation of school improvement plans.
- Monitoring of implementation of action plans. Some enterprises also provide teacher/management training and other capacity-building support. Others introduce schools to third-party providers, such as microfinance institutions or specialists.

## Results and Effectiveness

Most school evaluation and management service providers scaled rapidly in a short period of time. Since 2009, Gray Matters India has worked with more than 1,000 schools, both private and public, assessing more than 350,000 students in nine Indian states. Between 2000 and 2012, ITA's school improvement plan benefitted 3,000 head teachers, 15,000 teachers, 15,000 school management committee members, and 350,000 students in Pakistan. JET's current projects (active 2009–17) work with 3,462 schools, which serve about 2 million students.

LCDI currently affects 215,000 students in more than 230 schools in Malawi alone.

Furthermore, there is evidence of improved student achievement in schools using these services. LCDI-supported schools in one Ugandan district performed 45–55 percent better on examinations than control group schools (according to an independent evaluation). GMI reports that client schools assessed over two consecutive years show double-digit improvements in English and math. A self-evaluation of Impact Network found that over an 18-month period students' standardized test scores rose 7 percent in literacy and 25 percent in numeracy.

School management has also improved. ITA observed higher rates of tuition collection among low-cost private schools after it recommended that schools introduce tuition fee vouchers and direct bank transfers. After LCDI conducted school performance reviews, all 368 primary schools in the Dedza and Mulanje districts of Malawi developed a school improvement plan and almost 1,000 teachers and head teachers received school management and teacher training. GMI found that in more than 650 schools assessed for two consecutive years there was an average 15 percent increase in student enrollment and a 24 percent increase in parent satisfaction, indicating improved management.