

Ten Recommendations for Education Assessments in Latin America

Recommendations from PREAL Working Paper No. 40, *The Educational Assessments that Latin America Needs*, by the PREAL Working Group on Standards and Assessments (GTEE). March 2008.

Recent GTEE research has focused on the state of large-scale (census or sample-based), standardized assessments in Latin America. These assessments allow governments to compare the performance of students from different backgrounds and geographic areas. The following ten general recommendations are based on analysis of the purposes of assessments, the use of their results, their technical quality, and the institutional challenges they present.

Assessment must be seen as an integral element in a broader set of education policies and actions.

Assessment in and of itself does not produce improvement. There must be stable links between assessments and curriculum development, teacher training, research, policy design, communications and outreach, and other aspects of the education system.

Assessments should reflect a shared understanding of the state of education and ways to improve it.

This process should begin with public consultation and debate on what students should learn and on the purposes and consequences of assessment. A constructive public discussion of the results is crucial to tackling deficiencies and inequities in students' access to knowledge. This calls for investing in communication and outreach as much as (if not more than) in the assessment itself—before, during, and after test administration.

Assessment should help develop a sense of shared responsibility for education.

It should foster all stakeholders' commitment to education, each according to their position in the system and their area of activity. Efforts must be made to avoid using assessment as a means of assigning blame to specific actors for problems.

The full working paper may be accessed online at:

<http://www.preal.org/Archivos/Bajar.asp?Carpeta=Preal%20Working%20Papers&Archivo=PREAL%2040-English.pdf>

The region's assessment systems should gradually expand the range of subject areas being evaluated.

Civic education and other subjects apart from language and mathematics should be included in order to cover a broader spectrum of competencies and capacities than is currently captured.

The region's assessment systems should work to evaluate student progress over time,

since this can provide additional information on the impact of education policies, school actions, and teaching practices on student learning.

An assessment system is a long-term undertaking, which requires sustained government commitment and careful design.

Decisions must be made about the purposes and consequences of the assessment, the curricular areas to be included, topics and grades to be covered, and the frequency of assessment, among other things. Because careful planning takes time, it is not advisable to try to implement assessment systems over a short period.

A good assessment system needs investment,

primarily to establish qualified teams as well as to provide sufficient economic resources to properly implement all processes.

The assessment system should be fully transparent

with regard to the results and accountable to society.

Education ministries must make a serious and consistent commitment to use assessment results.

This entails fostering dialogue on the problems discovered, devising appropriate strategies to resolve them, and investing the necessary resources.

The assessment system should be evaluated periodically,

with an eye to analyzing the technical quality of the information it provides and its relevance for various educational and social actors.