

General Education in Armenia | 2025

| PROGRESS REPORT

A Courageous Reform

with Challenges in Communication,
Methods and Assessment



Yerevan 2025

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This report was compiled on the initiative of the "Participatory School" Educational Foundation, in collaboration with its partners, based on the research, reports, and materials presented during the Educational Forum 2024 organized on September 14, 2024, at the Armenian State Pedagogical University.

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Preface

The General Education in Armenia 2025 progress report addresses the reforms in the general education sector launched in Armenia since 2018, and particularly the qualitative and quantitative indicators related to the implementation of the new State Standard for General Education, the progress that has been achieved, and the issues recorded.

The report was created by the “Participatory School” Educational Foundation, in collaboration with its partners, the Institute of Public Policy, Transparency International Armenia, the Foundation for the Development of Democracy, DVV International, and the Teach for Armenia Educational Foundation, based on the analyses and research presented and discussions organized during the Educational Congress 2024 held in September 2024.

Several dozen experts, teachers, political scientists, economists, and representatives of public associations have worked on the document.

The report consists of five major thematic sections:

1. Competence-Based Education: Progress in Introduction of New Education Standards
2. A Pluralistic and Participatory Environment Participatory Culture and Governance
3. Social justice in the Education System
4. Educational Outcomes and Evaluation
5. Educational Policy, Governance, and Funding

The purpose of the collaborative work is to use research, studies, surveys, factual and professional conclusions in order to outline the development trends, successes, and gaps of the Armenian general education system, as well as to formulate recommendations for state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and all stakeholders in the education system who are involved in policy making.

We hope that the issues raised and the indicators and positions presented in the report will become a constructive basis for the improvement of the system and for ensuring the public good of quality and accessible education for all.

We wish you pleasant reading and look forward to hearing your feedback.

*Working Group
of the General Education in Armenia 2025
Progress Report*

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Competence-Based Education:

Progress in Introduction of New Education Standards

The new state standard for general education adopted in 2021 marks a new phase on the path of educational reforms, aimed at establishing competence-based learning.

This section addresses the challenges and successes related to the introduction of the new education standard in the Republic of Armenia, including legislative issues. The section also presents the effectiveness of training and certification. Studies and surveys have been conducted with teachers and principals as well as discussions with the professional community within the framework of the Usutschanots (“Teacher’s Lounge”) program.

An important positive step is the reduction of teachers' workload by reducing the teaching rate to 18 hours for primary grades and 20 hours in secondary schools

The analyses and studies suggest that there are several challenges that require coordinated steps. For example, although the new standard was piloted in the Tavush region before its general introduction, there continue to exist a number of issues today related to the lack of textbooks corresponding to the new standard, lack of clarity around the introduction of the credit system, and so on. At the same time, the process of ongoing certification for teachers, which began in this period, also has certain shortcomings related to assessing teacher's needs and ensuring the effectiveness of the process.

Each part of this section also presents recommendations aimed at improving the applicability of the state standard for general education, creating effective mechanisms, and ensuring the continuous improvement of the quality of education.

1.1

Challenges of introducing and applying the state standard for general education

This section of the report is based on a study with the same title conducted earlier by the Institute of Public Policy, as well as the analysis of additional data and development of policy proposals.

*Avetik Mejlumyan
Institute of Public Policy*

| General Description

The State Standard for General Education in Armenia defines competence as follows: “Competences are the effective and appropriate ways in which a learner responds to situations based on the knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes acquired during the process of learning and upbringing.” This definition holds the controversial position that values are included as a component within competences. Many experts believe that competences are aimed at solving specific problems; therefore, it is unacceptable to include values as a component of competences.

Another controversial aspect is that the new education standard does not clarify or specify the value system, which is a serious omission. As a comparison, it should be noted that the standard approved in 2010 separated the value system and listed more than a dozen values. There is a risk that textbook authors and teachers may simply ignore this new approach (especially given that the values have not been clearly defined).

At the same time, value assertions are present within the eight core competences, but the inclusion of values within a competence already narrows the conceptual content itself of values. Teachers are often unaware of the value system, what values they should shape during the learning process, and what methods they should use to shape the necessary values.

The education standard also defines final outcomes for the three levels of education (primary, basic, and secondary). “The final outcomes aim at the formation of competences,” the document states. Nevertheless, one cannot help but notice that there is no coordinated link between competences and the final outcomes. Nowhere is it stated which final outcome contributes to the formation of which competence. Thus, there is a risk that the eight core competences may simply play a formal role in the standard, as there is no roadmap to go from final outcomes to competences.

Besides the State Standard for General Education, the document has also developed subject-specific standards and curricula. The core innovations of the new standard include key ideas and cross-cutting concepts. The new standard also emphasizes the teaching of interdisciplinary linkages. This should also be considered a crucial part. However, sometimes there are so many interdisciplinary linkages listed in the subject curricula that it becomes impossible to teach such a course load in practice.

One of the positive aspects of the standard is that the topics in the subject curricula are linked to the final outcomes of the State Standard for General Education. This allows the teaching of each subject to be connected to the final outcomes of each education level. However, sometimes nearly two dozen final outcomes are listed for a single topic, which is excessively large in number and practically impossible when it comes to practical applicability.

Four to five years after the launch of the reforms, there are serious contradictions regarding the methodology for forming and assessing competences as final outcomes, and their application in graduating and non-graduating classes. State supporting and monitoring bodies (RA MESCS, NCEDI, RPPC, NCET, Education Inspectorate, ATC) face serious shortfalls in capacity to support in these matters when it comes to a lack of content, methodology, resources, and qualified professional staff. As a result, the work of the teaching staff in the system is not assessed professionally and equitably.

Specifically, there is the issue of aligning competence-based diagnostic and examination tasks with the new State Standard for General Education (SSGE). There is serious resistance in some segments of the system.

| Policy recommendations

Taking the observations mentioned above into consideration, we propose the following steps:

1. Form an interdisciplinary competence assessment group for the SSGE involving the bodies responsible for evaluating educational outcomes and including international experts. Through staffing and structural changes, strengthen methodological support when it comes to the task of forming and verifying competences to avoid dual interpretations within the system and distortion of the examination system that assesses competences.
2. Organize comprehensive training for state institutions such as NCEDI, RPPC, NCET, and ATC, involving international experts, and harmonize the work of these bodies to measure the quality of education in individual schools holistically, rather than solely for measuring the progress of individual teachers or students.
3. Develop a sample system for diagnostic and examination tasks that, using essays, project-based learning, or other assessment methods, provides the possibility to

measure the eight competences of the SSGE (with their knowledge, values, and skills components) as well as subject-specific final outcomes.

4. Create a roadmap for the formation of the eight core competences, which will make it possible to link them to school subjects and assess their progress.
5. Link the eight core competences with final outcomes at the three levels of education, indicating which final outcome can contribute to the formation of which competence.
6. Use the same format for the approach and structure of the description of standards and curricula for all subjects
7. Emphasize the role of key ideas and cross-cutting concepts in the educational process. To increase their applicability, develop manuals demonstrating how to apply them in the classroom. Make existing manuals more accessible to wider teaching communities.
8. Define a concrete set of assessment tools aligned with competence-based learning, carrying out targeted training in this direction that goes beyond mandatory certification.
9. Remove the value component from competences in the education standard and formulate it separately as a system of personal, social, and moral guidelines. Clarify the values that should play a central role in our educational system in order to guide teachers in their work.
10. Provide support, to the most equitable extent possible, to all schools for assessment and potential inspection activities (including checks) to achieve the State Standard for General Education. This support should include physical resources, equipment, mentorship, and so on.
11. Develop accessible resources for the presentation of the State Standard for General Education, subject-specific curricula, and standards for the teaching community, consisting of interactive platforms, educational videos, guidelines, and other auxiliary materials.
12. Ensure strong linkages within the chain of “textbook creation-development of the value system- compliance with the State Standard for General Education.”
13. Develop a tool to assess the performance or implementation of the State Standard for General Education.

1.2 | The effectiveness of voluntary and mandatory training and certification

This section of the report is based on a similarly-titled study and surveys conducted among 40 teachers in July-September 2024 for the Educational Congress 2024.

Siranush Tonoyan

Professional Board, "Participatory School" Educational Foundation

| General Observations

According to current legislation, teacher training is the process of acquisition and improvement of new professional knowledge, skills, and capacities by the teacher, occurring through an organization included in the list of guaranteed organizations, in accordance with the teacher training standards and programs set by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of the Republic of Armenia (hereinafter, the Ministry), and based on the results of the teacher's professional development needs assessment (hereinafter referred to as "needs assessment").

The need for professional development is defined as the gap identified by an assessment between a teacher's existing professional knowledge and capacities and the professional abilities and skills required for them to perform their functions.

The professional development cycle for a teacher lasts five years.

Each year, teachers undergo training based on their identified professional development needs. After completing the necessary credits from these training courses, the teacher is certified.

Over the years, teachers in Armenian schools have participated in various training programs aimed at developing their professional and subject-specific skills and capacities.

| Issues with Mandatory Teacher Certification

According to the mandatory teacher certification procedure introduced in Armenia, once every 5 years, teachers had to undergo mandatory certification carried out by the National Institute of Education. After this structure was disbanded, this authority was granted to organizations that presented modules conforming to the established education standard

requirements and final outcomes, which were then guaranteed by the National Center for Educational Development and Innovation (NCEDI) and subsequently approved by the Ministry. After the National Institute of Education was disbanded, this field opened up to competition, which ensured that teachers themselves would choose the organizations for their mandatory certification. However, our study shows that the choice of the organization for training was influenced not only by the quality of the training offered or the experts involved, but also by:

- Proximity to the teacher's place of residence.
- Recommendations and guidance from teachers in their circle of acquaintances.
- The school's selection of the organization.
- Having acquaintances among the staff of the training organization, and so on.

On the other hand, it is worth highlighting the following regarding the mandatory certification process:

- After completing training under this mandatory certification procedure, teachers did not receive support on how to apply the knowledge and skills they had acquired. For example, only 25% of the teachers who participated in the study had an understanding of how to apply the assessment, and 40% knew how to contribute to the formation of competences. While emphasizing the importance of using ICT tools in the teaching process, the majority of surveyed teachers noted that they had a scarcity of ICT tools, and consequently, faced a problem when it came to applying them, leading to their use most often only during lessons meant for "public display".
- Until 2023, there was no follow-up when it came to the process. For instance, teachers would participate in mandatory certification (training) courses, complete the prescribed number of credits, and were considered certified. The conformity of the credits to the defined final outcomes would be verified by the training organization, but it was almost impossible to determine the extent to which the credits given by that organization corresponded to the defined final outcomes. Furthermore, there were no studies that could demonstrate in practice the percentage of teachers that had failed to pass the process by not meeting the standard requirements or final outcomes. In reality, almost no teachers would fail the mandatory certification process.

When asked what teachers got from the mandatory certification process, the teachers and principals who participated in our study noted that teacher training facilitated mastery of new methods, familiarization with and understanding of ongoing changes as well as the creation of various subject-specific groups and discussion forums, allowing teachers to share their experience and discuss common problems. This last point highlights the degree to which teachers self-organize and demonstrates the importance of ongoing support to teachers after they complete training.

| Challenges of Regular Teacher Certification

In 2024, the process of regular teacher training and certification underwent certain changes and will be carried out based on the assessment of professional needs. Four levels of difficulty have been established for each training component, along with an external assessment.

The professional needs assessment is carried out by teachers and principals, who fill out a questionnaire in the School Management Information System (SMIS). When a principal and teacher disagree regarding the needs assessment, the principal’s assessment of the given teacher’s needs is taken as the basis for the difficulty level of the training to be organized. Teachers’ professional development needs are outlined in modules, with a corresponding level indicated for each module.

The regular or mandatory certification serves as the basis to determine a teacher’s suitability for their position, but no salary increase or additional payments are planned.

The following uncertainties exist related to this new change:

1. At first, problems arose among teachers and principals regarding how to fill out the SMIS questionnaires.

When answering the questions in the needs assessment questionnaire, the teachers and principals were unable to understand the level at which the teacher would be placed. The questionnaire was problematic and needed further clarification, as evidenced in the beginning of September 2024, when an allowance was made to redo the teachers’ needs assessments conducted before June 10, 2024.

2. The wording of the questions used to conduct the teachers’ needs assessment is also problematic.

For example: For the module on Teaching Methods and Strategies, the following questions are presented, none of which make teachers’ needs measurable, because it is not clear how many interactive methods and strategies a teacher needs to know in order to answer “yes” to the first question or, if a teacher is aware of about 10 interactive methods, how many they need to apply to also answer “yes” to the second question.

The teacher is aware of interactive methods and strategies.	
The teacher applies interactive methods.	
The teacher adapts interactive methods and strategies to teaching goals and learning outcomes, adjusting them to the physical environment.	
The teacher is familiar with the principles and methods of remote and hybrid teaching.	
The teacher applies the principles and methods of remote and hybrid teaching.	

Or, let us consider instead the module component titled Application of Resources, which opens into the following windows:.

The teacher is aware of what resources are available in the school library or laboratory.	
The teacher uses the resources available in the school library and laboratory.	
The teacher adapts the available resources to teaching goals and outcomes.	
The teacher creates new educational resources using available resources.	

The teacher is aware of what resources are available online.	
The teacher uses online resources.	
The teacher adapts the available resources to teaching goals and outcomes.	
The teacher creates new educational resources using online resources.	

And this leads to questions once again: What are the resources being referred to, or how many resources must a teacher use to answer “yes” to the second question?

If we continue in this way to examine the questions designed for all components of the module intended to determine the level of teachers undergoing training, other questions arise that need clarification.

What forms of thinking should the teacher be familiar with, and how many should they be in number? Which methods and resources for developing work skills should the teacher apply, and how many should they be in number? Which skills and methods for living in the real world should the teacher apply, and how many should they be in number? What form of identifying student needs in the classroom should the teacher know and apply? How many conferences or professional development activities should the teacher participate in to answer “yes” or “no”?

- 3. The next issue, which remained unclear as of September 2024, stemmed from the fact that neither teachers nor the training organizations knew exactly how the knowledge and skills they acquired after training would be measured against the established final outcomes would be measured. As a result of this, during the reassessment of needs, very many schools saw teachers’ needs reassessed in such a way as to categorize most teachers at level 2.
- 4. According to the new procedure, teachers’ regular certification becomes ongoing in nature, meaning that a teacher does not complete regular certification in one go during a

single year. The process lasts 3-5 years, depending on the level. However, the toolkit for measuring control remains unclear.

5. Even if one acknowledges that the process is new and it is natural for problems to occur, one must admit that they should not be so numerous and vague. It is still unclear what the examination procedure will be at the end of the teacher training cycle and what wording has been or will be used for questions.

Despite the fact that this phase of regular certification was ending (September 2024), there were still teachers who had been placed at the wrong level. Moreover, the teachers who had been placed at Levels 3 and 4 had then been forcibly lowered. If a study is conducted after the regular certification process to determine the percentage of teachers that were placed at levels 3 and 4 during the needs assessment phase and then ended up at level 2 after completing diagnostic tests at those levels in training organizations, one could conclude that the needs assessment questionnaires are not reliable instruments, because even after a second needs assessment, the principals seem to have incorrectly assessed the needs of their schoolteachers.

And if we assume that the teacher needs assessment questionnaires are clear and reliable instruments, and continue to serve as the basis for assessing teachers' needs, then this leads to another question – how could one explain the fact that a second needs assessment brought down a large number of teachers from levels 3 and 4 to level 2? Was this a forced reclassification by the training organizations?

| Challenges of Voluntary Teacher Certification

Voluntary teacher certification aims to promote continuous teacher development and increase salaries but poses risks, as teachers who fail the second attestation are dismissed, leading to vacancies. Many teachers avoid the process due to fear of losing their jobs and reputation. Technical issues persist, including problems with the electronic system and an imbalance in test difficulty across subjects; some subjects (e.g., social studies, technology) have easier tests, while others (e.g., History of Armenia, Armenian Language and Literature, Physical Education, Chemistry, Russian Language) have more challenging tests that teachers struggle to pass.

| Action recommendations

1. The relevant state support bodies must ensure a professional and fair system for verifying the training process and its outcomes. The current lack of such a system significantly harms the progress of quality reforms and discourages both teachers and trainers.

Accordingly, the methodology and innovations of the new competence-based education standard should be encouraged to avoid possible uncertainties and misunderstandings.

2. It is necessary to ensure that schools are capable and empowered to finance from their own budgets the training of their teachers in both basic and supplementary thematic programs, as these are crucial for a teacher's professional development. Mandatory certification modules are often delivered in group settings, with the pace of the course designed at the expense of quality, saving on time and prioritizing the trainers' profitability. This makes it necessary to diversify the types of guaranteed training modules.
3. It is proposed to create an opportunity for training organizations, teachers, principals, and other interested parties to participate in the legislative initiatives, changes, and the development of questionnaires and rubrics that regulate the field.
4. The competence assessment system for voluntary teacher certification needs to be modernized by adding methodological, value-based, and skills-based components to the knowledge assessment. Their inclusion along with practical work will allow for a fairer encouragement of teachers through voluntary certification and ensure the collaborative skills of the teacher within the school staff.
5. It is necessary to establish a system of feedback with voluntarily certified teachers and their schools to assess their progress after certification.
6. It is necessary to avoid limiting or monopolizing the knowledge base and list of literature in the voluntary certification guidelines (e.g., using only one textbook for preparation), thereby ensuring equal conditions for newly-created educational literature.
7. It is necessary to provide a reliable toolkit for measuring the continuous support given to certified teachers.

1.3

Legislative issues in the implementation of the education standard

This section of the report is based on a study conducted for the Educational Congress 2024.

Hovhannes Stepanyan

Principal of Noravan Secondary School

Professional Board, "Participatory School" Educational Foundation

One of the most important reforms of the RA Government, the introduction of the new State Standard for General Education, has faced challenges when it comes to adopting legislative changes and harmonizing regulations. This is a particularly crucial issue when it comes to ensuring that competence-based education is not hindered by contradictions with existing legal and organizational regulations.

The reform of the education system has been a top priority and this has included clarifications in:

- conceptual ideas regarding general education,
- educational policy,
- the content provided through education,
- the requirements for the development of a citizen of the Republic of Armenia,
- the definition of what the state or society expect,
- the fundamental principles of organizing education.

To achieve the above-mentioned goals and successfully tackle the stated problems, the Government of the Republic of Armenia has initiated a fundamental reform and ensured the advanced development of a key component in the education system – general education. This began with a review of the package of normative documents (State Standard for General Education, subject standards and curricula, assessment system) that define the content and organization of the process of general education.

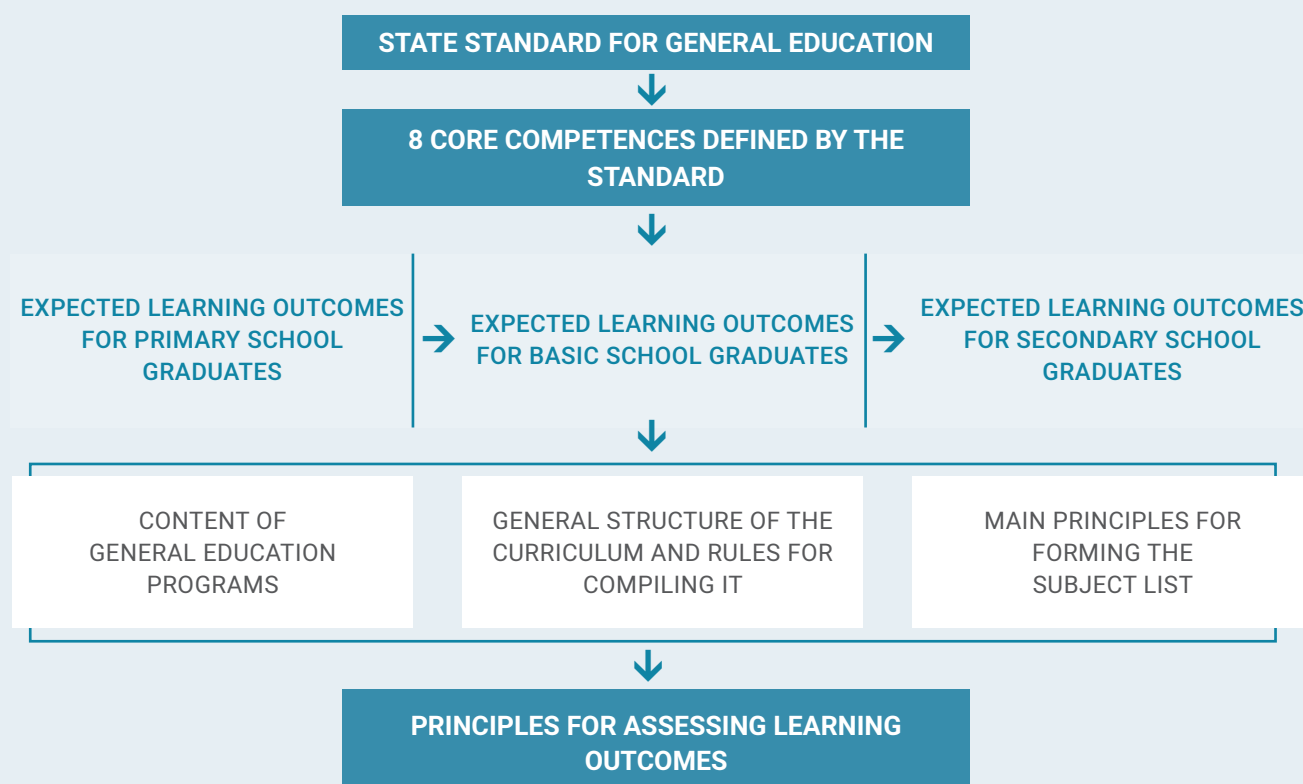
The new State Standard for General Education was approved by Government Decision No. 136-N dated February 4, 2021, according to which:

- The State Standard for General Education is formed from the following components of basic general education programs: academic domains and the requirements presented for their content
- The qualitative requirements for graduates, according to educational levels (competences and expected learning outcomes by educational levels).
- The general structure of the academic plan and the rules for compiling it, as well as the fundamental principles for forming subject lists.
- The forms, scale, and procedure for assessing students.

Any standard attempts to systematize the knowledge taught in school. Unlike the previous standard, the new one establishes:

1. No specific time for academic subjects, but rather for academic domains, which gives schools considerable freedom to choose the list of subjects and the time allocated to each subject, while maintaining the requirements of the education standard.
2. An individual (elective) component provided for academic clubs and projects.
3. Time allocated for extended-day clubs with state funding.
4. A more systematic approach to final outcomes in the form of eight competences.
5. Types of student learning outcome assessment: diagnostic, formative, and summative (descriptive and graded), the forms and methods of which are chosen by the teacher.

SCHEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE NEW STATE STANDARDS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION



The state standard for general education was piloted in Tavush for three years, thanks to which many issues were identified and reviewed, and clear solutions and corrections were provided. However, some issues remain unresolved or are in the process of finding a resolution.

| Issues and Proposed Actions

To solve the existing problems, the authorized bodies must provide legislative changes and clarifications.

1. In grade 10, teaching with a targeted program has been introduced, whereas targeted (advanced) programs have only been approved for the subject of mathematics.
2. According to the State Standard for General Education, the total sum of allocated percentages for academic domains in primary school is 97%, as a result of which schools cannot ensure the maximum permissible daily academic workload level for schoolchildren, which was approved by the guideline of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports and decree No. 12-N dated March 28, 2017 of the Minister of Health. There is no mention of a minimum level. This order has also not yet defined the level of difficulty of newly-introduced or integrated subjects. Besides this, the order contains a contradiction between the maximum permissible workload for schoolchildren at the daily and weekly levels

| The maximum permissible daily academic workload levels for schoolchildren:

Grades	Maximum daily academic workload level
1	No more than 4 classes a day, 5 classes on only one day a week due to physical education
2-4	No more than 5 classes a day, 6 classes on only one day a week due to physical education
5-6	No more than 6 classes a day
7-12	No more than 7 classes a day

The maximum permissible daily academic workload levels for schoolchildren:

Grades	Maximum weekly academic workload level (academic hours)	
	6-day school week	5-day school week
1	22	20
2-4	25	22
5	31	28
6	32	29
7	34	31
8-9	35	32
10-12	36	33

It is also necessary to define the minimum workload for schoolchildren, which stems from the new State Standard for General Education.

3. The State Standard for General Education (hereinafter, the Standard) should define the minimum and maximum workload for schoolchildren, which renders the school-based component of curricula no longer necessary.
4. The credit system for learners has not yet been defined, and it is unclear whether a child in grade 10 with a targeted curriculum can complete enough credits and be admitted to university.
5. The Standard stipulates that in the third stage of secondary education, the curriculum of an educational institution implementing a state program includes core subjects as mandated by the state and subjects from targeted programs as chosen by the student, the state final exams and subjects from the domain of "Physical Education and Safe Living". In the third stage of secondary education, during the implementation of core and targeted subject programs, it is mandatory to teach the subjects of Armenian language, literature, history of Armenia, mathematics, and at least one foreign language, either as separate or integrated subjects. Here, it is necessary to clarify the subjects considered mandatory by the state.

6. The explanation from the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports regarding specialists who are qualified to teach integrated subjects in general education institutions (a version that has been revised around three times and sent to schools) requires further clarification. For example, are music and fine arts considered integrated subjects? The circular states that music and fine arts (grades 1-4) should be taught by a relevant teacher or a primary school teacher who has undergone subject-specific training. This also needs clarification given that such training has not yet been offered or was organized in a way that left primary school teachers unaware of it.
7. For optimising teachers' workload, it is important to exclude paper repetitions in parallel with the use of electronic forms.
8. It is recommended that school principals be allowed to have a limited number of class hours in order to effectively fulfill their responsibilities of classroom management and instructional management and to make the position of principal more attractive.

1.4 | The process for creating new textbooks

| General observations

Parallel to the introduction of the new state and subject-specific standards in Armenia, a process was launched to create textbooks aligned with them, based upon the new ideology. In practice, the organization of this process, starting from the procedure for the tender, was full of gaps, contradictions, and problems with technical and legal regulations. As a result, the established deadlines were not met for printing the textbooks and distributing them to schools. This serious and deep-rooted reform process was rushed in a short period. Consequently, a number of textbooks either failed to pass the threshold or were simply not submitted. Some approved textbooks do not match the subject's curriculum and standard, and some are not competence based but merely serve as a source for transmitting knowledge to students.

Another issue consists of the structure of the curricula and textbooks for integrated subjects. The latter are practically thematic sections of separate subjects, and there is no real integration of core concepts. This issue is mainly characteristic of subjects in the natural sciences (STEM) at all levels of education.

| Social Science Subjects

There is a gap between the standards for social science subjects and the linguistic abilities of schoolchildren. The proposed topics do not match the likelihood that students will understand them. It is true that (1) each textbook author has the responsibility to present complex topics in a way that students can understand them, (2) each teacher has the responsibility to teach in a way that ensures student progress. It is also a weighty argument that (3) a good textbook can contribute to the development of linguistic abilities.

However, the three arguments mentioned above do not solve the problem. What percentage of today's 8th graders, with their current abilities, will understand a topic like "The Moral and Legal Aspects of Justice" or "Thinking: Inductive and Deductive Thinking," which, incidentally, has major flaws in its wording in the education standard? One must address this reality and not consider the approach of "memorize this text and then repeat it in class" as an acceptable option for the learning process. The inclusion of pictures and graphics in the textbook, along with a variety of games, do not solve the problem either. The level of linguistic ability and worldview of students living in modern-day Armenia, indeed the reality of everyday life, will hardly allow them to truly comprehend these topics.

There are two paths available from here. First, one can undertake comprehensive measures to improve learners' linguistic abilities, or second, one can lower the ambitions of the education standard. If no provisions are made for the first solution, then it is possible to at least resort to the second. It is better for children to fully comprehend simpler topics than to stumble through complex ones by memorizing them. The first path would imply, for example, making high-quality Armenian translations and localized versions available of widely popular children's, young adult films, and acceptable computer games.

Another important problem lies with subject-specific standards. A cursory glance at the new social science standard reveals that a significant portion of its topics are taken from textbooks written under the old education standard. It is also clear that authors who previously held a monopoly have a significant advantage in the final allocation of competitive textbooks. This advantage continues to increase under questionable circumstances. When the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports announced a tender simultaneously for social science textbooks for grades 9, 11, and 12 in 2024, it significantly favored large institutions with greater capabilities that had published textbooks under the old education standard, putting institutions with more modest capabilities in a very difficult position.

In the textbook selection phase, there have been cases where a teacher was forced to change their chosen textbook because the principal and coordinating official pointed out the high printing cost of the alternative textbook. The selection was also influenced by the opinions of principals, librarians, publishers, and specialists holding certain positions or conducting voluntary certification. The two-weeks period allotted for this phase is not enough for a proper examination of the textbooks and an objective, participatory discussion within the methodological unit.

Due to the introduction of the education standard, the textbooks for some grades are still missing (for example, the Russian textbook for grades 2, 8, and 10, and others). Teachers continue to teach with old textbooks or materials provided by NCEDI, adapting them to the new subject curricula and standards.

| Policy recommendations

To ensure quality educational content and standard-based textbooks and learning materials, the following steps are recommended:

1. The state should encourage the creation of competence-based learning materials and textbooks.

2. The evaluation of textbooks and learning materials should be preceded by clarifications on the criteria for checking compliance with the State Standard for General Education (SSGE), and a professional expert platform should be created to avoid various arbitrary evaluations.
3. The time, format, technical criteria, and financial compensation provided by the state for textbook creation must be sufficient to ensure proper remuneration for specialists and the development of quality textbooks.
4. During the state review phase for textbooks, effective legal mechanisms should be implemented to prevent conflicts of interest, arbitrary and non-measurable decisions (which bypass the evaluation scale), or the endorsement of textbooks based on personal and group preferences.
5. When it comes to teachers' rights to freely choose between two alternative textbooks, there should be mechanisms to rule out the unsolicited influence and opinions of principals, librarians, the Textbook Revolving Fund (TRF), and other third parties, as well as making the textbook selection dependent on printing costs and other forms of bias.
6. Support should be provided for the protection of the rights of authors involved in textbook creation groups, as they are often deprived of intellectual property rights or are not remunerated during the textbook creation phase.
7. The availability of methodological materials for teachers and state support for their procurement should be ensured.



A Pluralistic and Participatory Environment

Participatory Culture and Governance

A democratic state and society begin at school. It is for this reason that schools are called upon to shape eloquent, free, and conscious citizens. It is in this context that it is important for a pluralistic, inclusive, and participatory environment to exist in school, making everyone's opinion and position as important and influential as possible.

A number of recent legislative changes have provided such an opportunity and created a basis for the formation of a participatory culture in schools. Nevertheless, studies show that there is often a tendency to bypass participatory practices and democratic legal regulations.

The research conducted for this report was aimed at clarifying the degree to which a participatory and pluralistic environment exists in schools, particularly in school consultative bodies. Surveys were conducted among educators, parents, and students in several schools.

The results demonstrated that there are a number of problems when it comes to school consultative bodies. These councils are often formal in nature. The electoral and decision-making processes of student councils and other such bodies are not carried out according to the principles of horizontality and legal equality. Sometimes, elements of authoritarian governance are hidden beneath the democratic regulations defined in the procedures. The main reasons for this include the lack of participatory skills among the teaching staff, the lack of skills when it comes to managing meetings, and value-system issues.

Participatory and collaborative practices are not applied in such important bodies as the pedagogical council and methodological units, through which the eight core competences defined by the new State Standard for General Education (SSGE) should be developed. The statements about a democratic school culture are often symbolic in nature and are in contradiction with the content being taught. The general conclusion is that pluralism and a participatory culture were absent in the majority of the schools that were studied.

At the same time, the report points out the legal regulations and opportunities that can help implement participatory governance in schools.

The multi-faceted teaching of the subject of social science, starting from grade 7, especially opens up such opportunities.

2.1 | Participatory governance: the role of councils in schools

This section of the report is based on online surveys and a similarly titled study conducted for the Educational Congress 2024.

*Nona Poghosyan, Ashot Baghdasaryan
Professional Board, "Participatory School" Educational Foundation*

| Problem and Research Tools

There are several legal regulations and opportunities for the implementation of participatory governance in general education institutions.

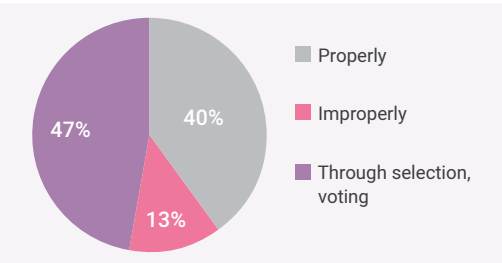
In order to study the participatory culture and pluralism in school consultative bodies, questionnaires were created and a number of surveys were conducted within the pedagogical, parent, and student councils.

STUDY 1. Pedagogical Council

The survey was conducted online and involved 135 teachers from 28 schools across 10 regions of Armenia. The results are as follows:

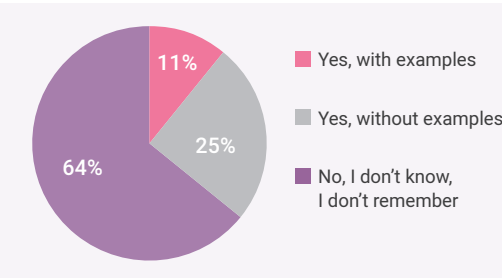
1. Describe how the members of the Governance Board were selected from the Pedagogical Council of your school:

The most frequent response was:
Based on the principal's proposal



2. Have there been cases where an issue or proposal raised by teachers was transferred by the Pedagogical Council to the school's Governance Board, and vice versa, when decisions made by the Governance Board were passed on to the teachers? If yes, provide examples.

The most frequent answer was:
Bonuses



3. How does the Pedagogical Council work with the school's Governance Board, Parent Council, and Student Council? Provide examples.

Only 12 people among 135 teachers provided examples of collaboration, namely

- renovation and furnishing of the teachers' lounge at school
- improving the quality of education and reducing unnecessary absences
- organizing school events
- strengthening the parent-school connection

4. What proposals have members of the Pedagogical Council made during their meetings, how were these proposals received, and what was their outcome?

32 people mentioned certain proposals, including

- 12 people mentioning that the proposal was to have a five-day work week,
- 4 people mentioning the proposal to acquire ICT tools, a computer, or a copier,
- 4 people mentioning the distribution of pilot textbooks, projects, and a component of the academic plan,
- The remaining 103 people do not recall any proposals made.

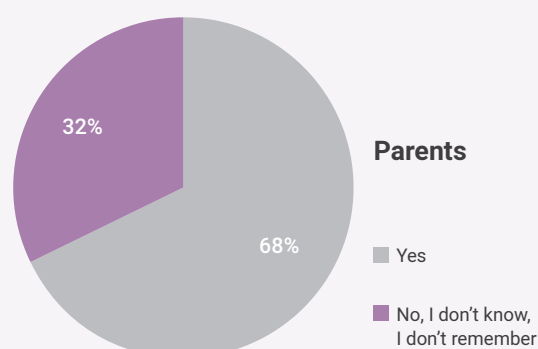
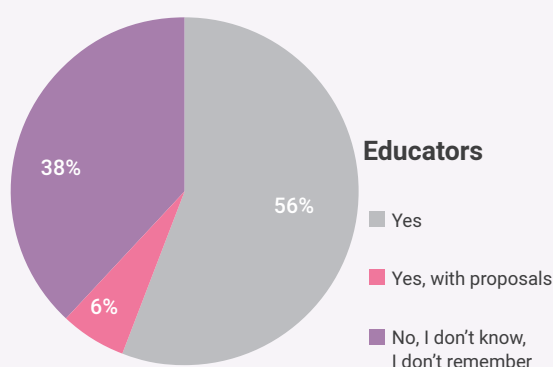
One noteworthy comment

- The same people almost always do the speaking.

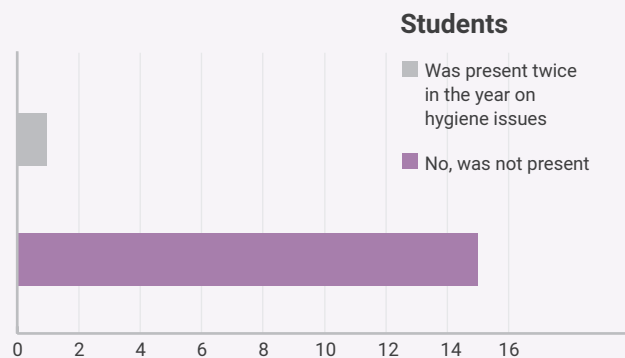
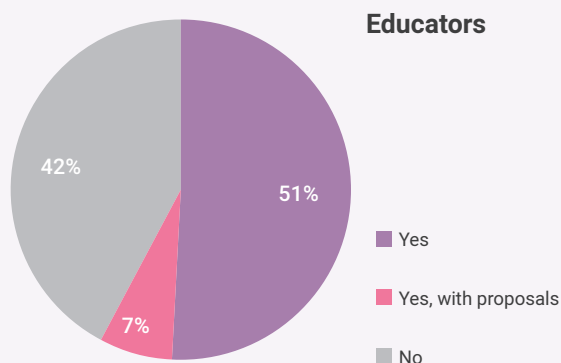
5. What initiatives has the school's Pedagogical Council undertaken?

- Only 10 respondents mentioned an initiative.

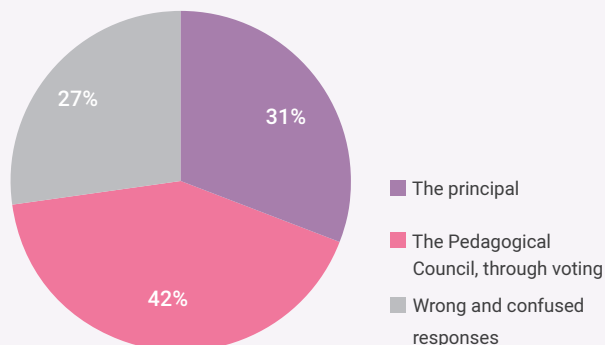
6. Has the head of the Parent Council participated in any of the Pedagogical Council's meetings, or have they made any proposals? Did they participate in the voting on any agenda item?



7. Has the head or a representative of the Student Council participated in any meeting of the Pedagogical Council, or made any proposals?:



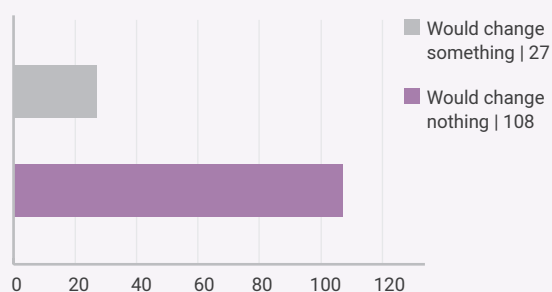
8. Describe how the decisions of the Pedagogical Council are made and who makes the final decision.



9. What would you like to change in how your school's Pedagogical Council works to make it more effective?

Noteworthy responses

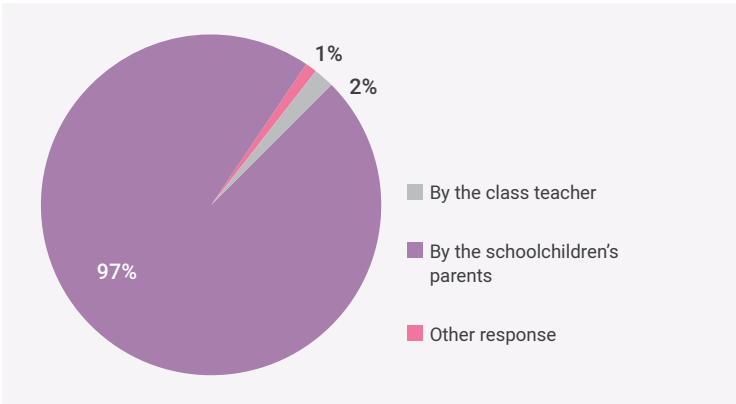
- Replace the minutes with audio recordings.
- Collaborate more with each other, share experiences, and seek new solutions.
- Pay more attention to discussions on methodology and pedagogy, especially for grades where the new State Standard for General Education has been introduced.
- I would like it to truly become a Pedagogical COUNCIL, where issues are discussed, decisions are based on research and data, other stakeholders can participate, and proposals are made for solutions to the problems faced by the school.
- Actually discuss agenda items, rather than just listen and either approve or reject.



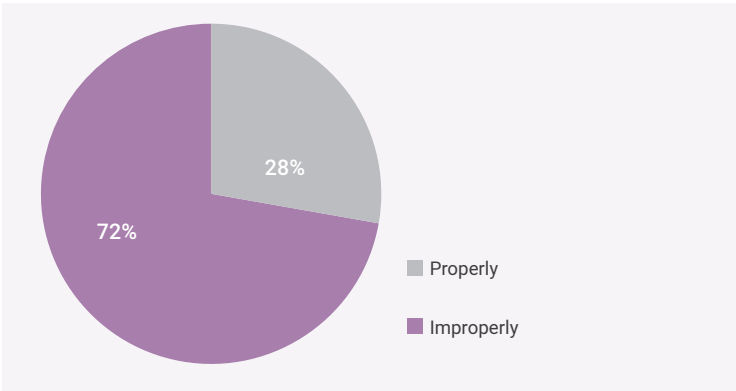
STUDY 2. Parent Council

The survey was conducted online and involved 90 parents from 30 schools in 9 regions of Armenia.

1. How was the Parent Council of your class formed?



2. Describe how the Parent Council of your school was formed.



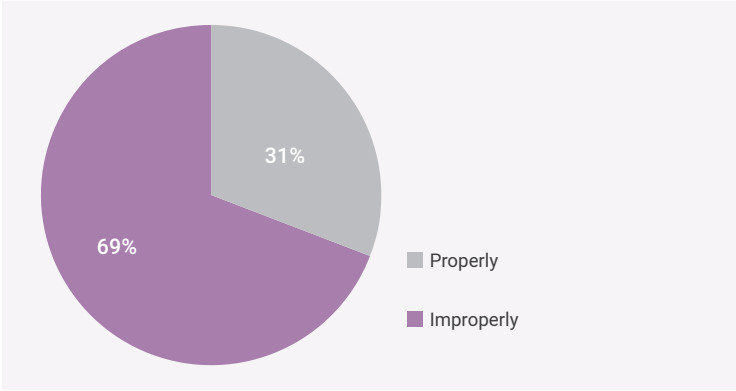
3. Describe how the Chairperson of your school's Parent Council was elected.

Noteworthy response

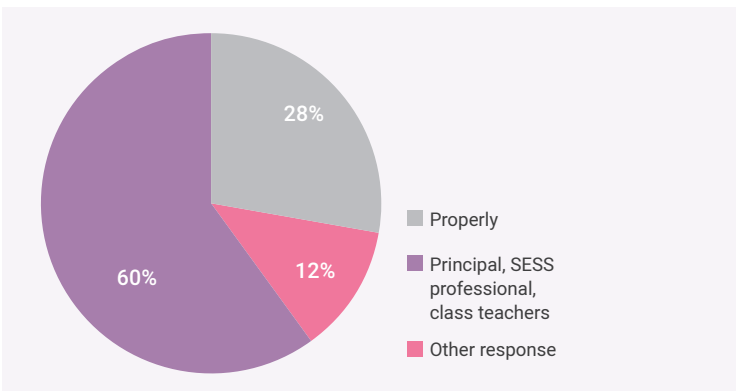
- We elected an unemployed parent who had available time.

Common responses

- Selected by the parents and school leadership.
- We elected a parent who had a higher education degree.



4. Who calls together a Parent Council meeting and how? Who runs the Parent Council meeting? Who takes minutes?

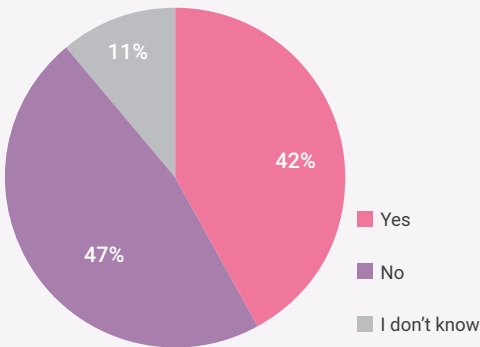
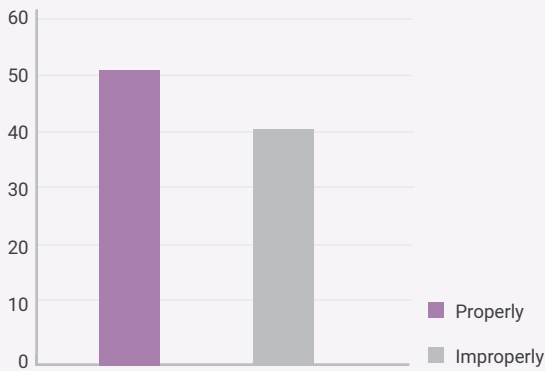
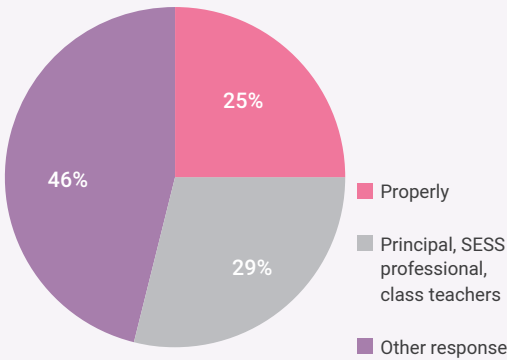


5. What proposals have parents made during Parent Council meetings? How were those proposals received? What steps were taken?
6. How are decisions made during Parent Council meetings? Who is the final decision maker?
7. Describe how the members of the Governance Board were selected from the Parent Council of your school.
8. Have there been cases where a question or proposal from parents was passed by the Parent Council to the school's Governance Board, and vice versa – decisions made by the Governance Board were passed on to the parents? If yes, provide examples.
9. How does the Parent Council work with the school's Governance Board, Pedagogical Council, and Student Council? Provide examples.

A noteworthy response

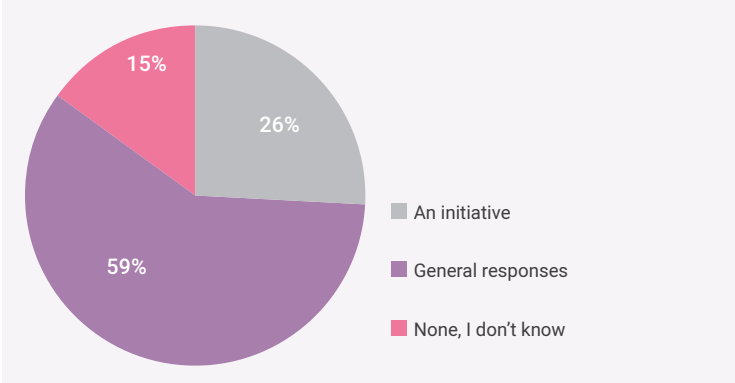
- **By collecting money for various events.**

- **Out of 90 parents, only 28 (34.4%) listed some proposals.**



- **Only 8 out of 90 respondents provided any examples of collaboration.**

10. What initiatives has the school’s Parent Council undertaken?

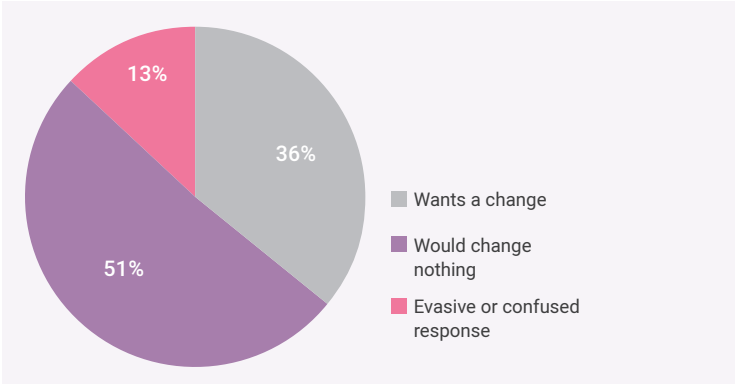


11. In what community development programs has the Parent Council participated?

- Only 13 out of 90 respondents mentioned a program. For example, garbage disposal, landscaping, tree planting.
- The rest have not participated in any program.

12. What would you like to change about how your school’s Parent Council works to make it more effective?

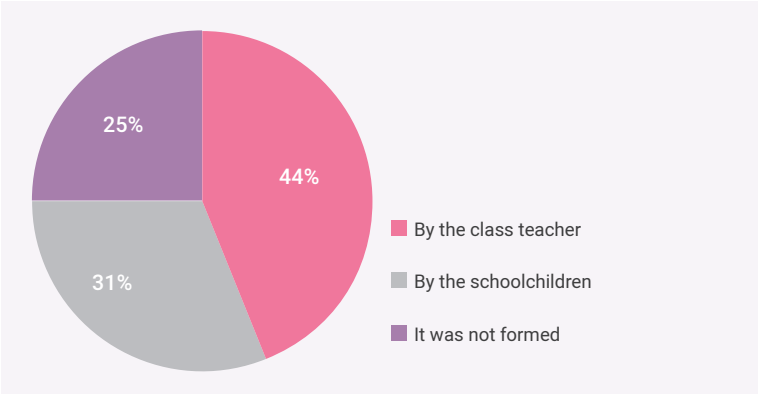
- Parenting courses.
- The head of the parent council should work with all parent committees, voice the problems in the classrooms, and seek ways to resolve them, actively participating in the meetings of the Parent Council.
- I would like the Parent Council to be more organized, and for each person not just to be interested in their child’s grades.
- The voice of the Parent Council should be heard, at least a little.



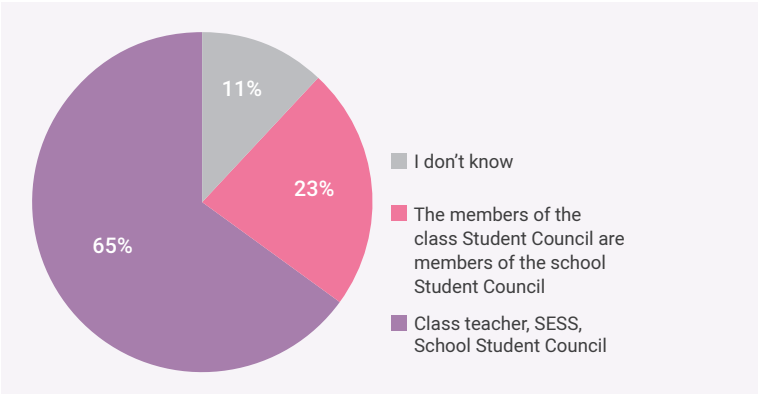
STUDY 3. Student Council

The survey was conducted offline and involved 16 students from 4 schools in 3 regions of Armenia.

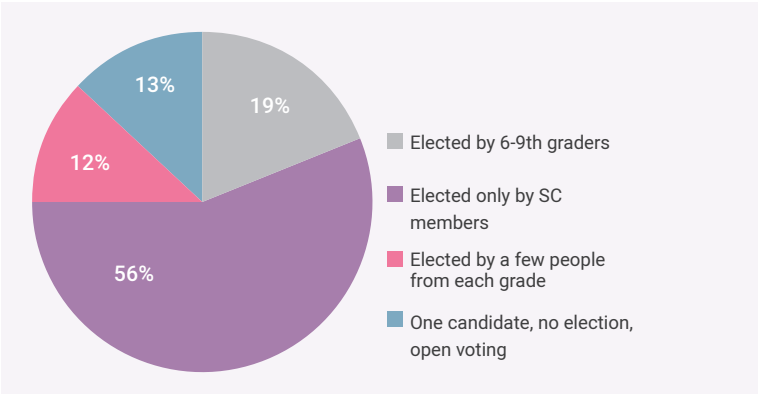
1. How was the Student Council of your class formed?



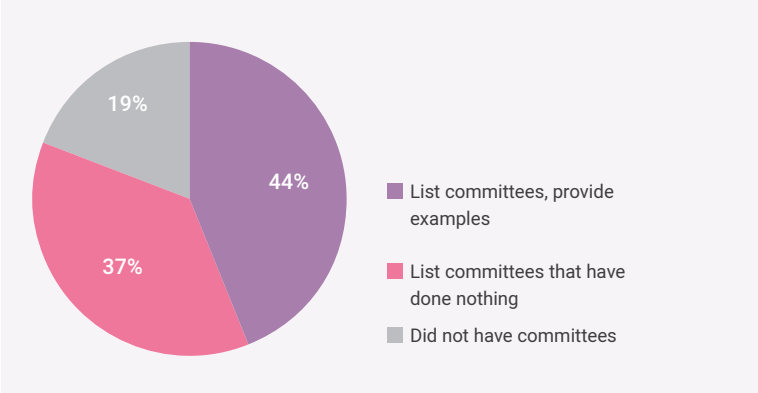
2. Describe how the Student Council of your school was formed.



3. Describe how the Chairperson of your school's Student Council was elected.

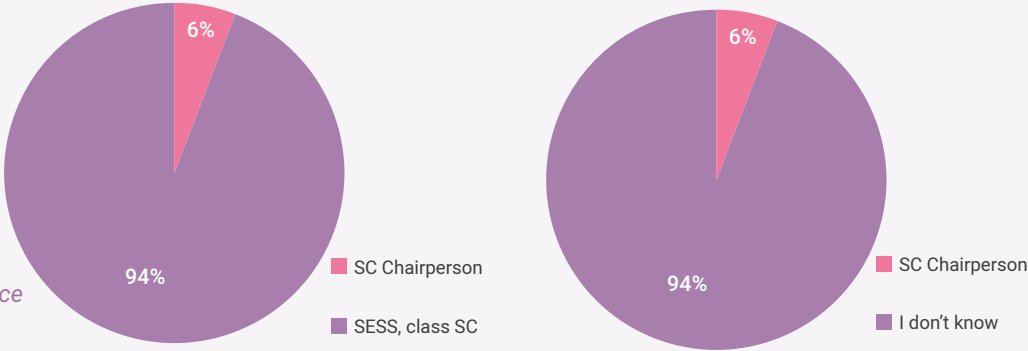


4. What specialized committees exist in your school, how were they formed, and how were the coordinators of these committees selected? Provide one example of the activity of each committee.

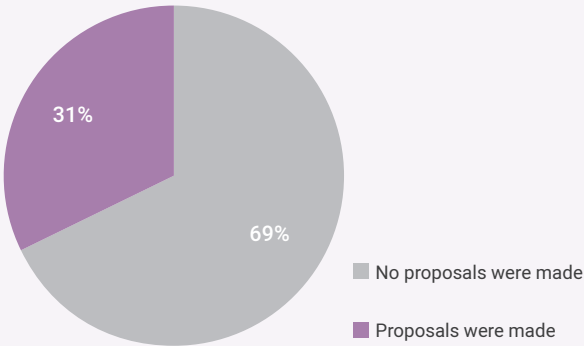


5. Who convenes and chairs the meetings of the Student Council, with what frequency, and who records the minutes?

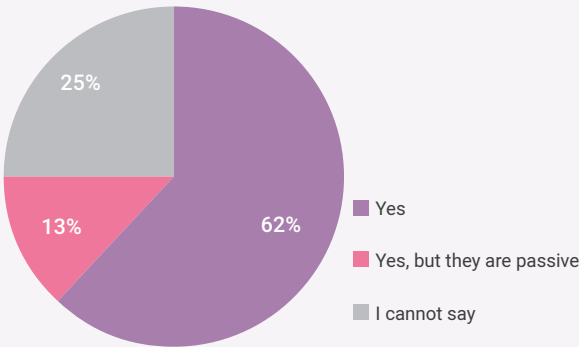
The frequency of the meetings was indicated by all respondents as once a month.



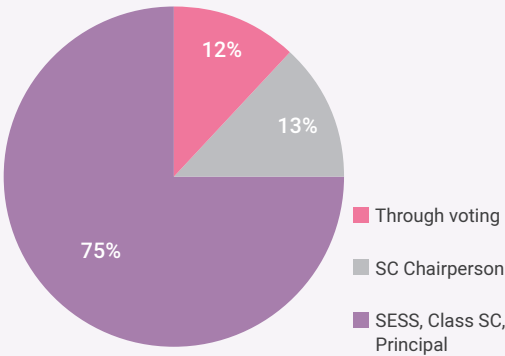
6. What proposals have the members of the Student Council put forward during their meetings?



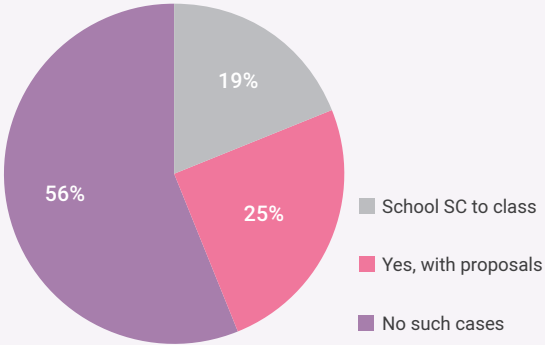
7. Do all members have the opportunity to ask questions, express opinions, and make proposals?



8. How are decisions made?



9. Have there been cases where a question or proposal from your class Student Council was passed on to the school’s Student Council, and vice versa – decisions made by the school’s Student Council were passed on to you? If yes, provide examples.



10. How does the Student Council work with the school’s Governance Board, Pedagogical Council, and Parent Council? Provide examples.

● All respondents said that there has not been any collaboration; they did not even know what the Governance Board was.

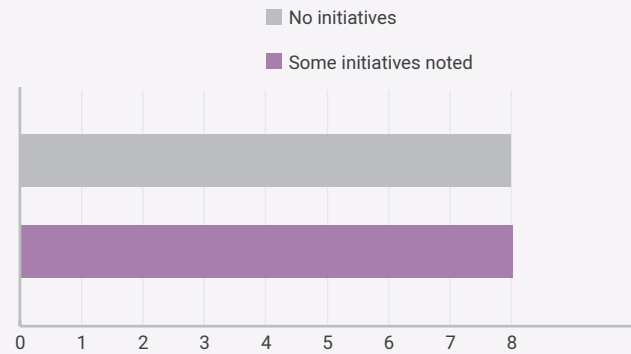
11. Has the head or a representative of the Student Council participated in any meeting of the Parent Council, or made any proposals? What agenda item was discussed with their participation?

● No.

12. Has the head or a representative of the Student Council participated in any meeting of the Governance Board, or made any proposals? What agenda item was discussed with their participation?

● No.

13. What initiatives has the school’s Student Council undertaken?



14. In what community development programs has the Student Council participated?

● All students responded, “No programs.”

15. Does the Student Council work with the self-governing bodies of students from other educational institutions? If yes, provide examples.

● All students responded, “No.”

Summari

Positive

Negative

Elections

Members of the Governance Board have been elected from the Pedagogical Council and Parent Council mainly through secret ballot.

Attempts are being made to conduct Student Council elections according to the right procedure, often running them similar to National Assembly elections.

The Principal tries to influence the election of the Chairperson of the Parent Council, while class teachers, the SESS, and class SC influence the election of the Chairperson and the members of the Student Council.

Participation

One-third of the surveyed educators have made certain proposals during meetings concerning the updating of the material-technical base, curriculum distribution, and textbook selection.

The chairperson of the Parent Council and the chairperson or a representative of the Student Council rarely participate in meetings of the Pedagogical Council and do not make proposals.

Collaboration

Examples of collaboration among consultative bodies include participation in events, field trips, and clean-up days, as well as parental support for renovation work.

Collaboration among the consultative bodies, and between the consultative bodies and the Governance Board is very weak.

Not a single member of the Student Council had heard of the Governance Board.

Decision making

The majority of teachers, parents, and students understand that decisions should be made after discussion and through voting, and that everyone has the right to speak and express an opinion.

However, the majority notes that the final decision maker is the principal, and the principal's opinion hold more weight.

Recommendations

From educators	From parents
I would like it to truly become a Pedagogical COUNCIL, where issues are discussed, decisions are based on research and data, other stakeholders can participate, and proposals are made for solutions to the problems faced by the school.	The head of the parent council should work with all parent committees, voice the problems in the classrooms, and seek ways to resolve them, actively participating in the meetings of the Parent Council.
Actually discuss agenda items, rather than just listen and either approve or reject.	The voice of the Parent Council should be heard, at least a little.

Conclusions

A culture of participatory governance is still absent in schools. In consultative bodies, legal requirements are formally maintained, and in the meeting minutes, everything seems to be in compliance with the legislation. However, surveys show that, no issues are really discussed, or the discussion is merely a formality. The principal intervenes in the decision-making process and influences them through indirect instructions; the final decision maker is the principal.

Members of the Pedagogical Council

- do not make proposals, lack the courage to express an opinion, or do not show initiative.
- wait when choosing certification organizations so that they can hear what the principal will say. They are not interested in the organization’s activities, quality, or the content of the modules. Instead, they prefer those close to their residence, attending the same courses as their colleagues, and most importantly, the principal’s approval.
- are unaware when choosing textbooks about how a particular textbook ended up on their table. The textbooks are chosen by principals and librarians without considering the teachers’ opinions. In fairness, it should be noted that teachers are given a short amount of time to study the textbooks and make the right choice.
- should discuss issues such as curriculum planning, class scheduling, and the selection and number of assessment types during meetings of methodological units and the Pedagogical Council. Unfortunately, teachers are unaware of these rights, and even if they are, few have the courage to exercise them.

Parent councils are not functioning in reality.

- Twice a year, the principal convenes a meeting for all parents and leads it, briefly presenting the annual academic and educational work plan and report.
- Parents do not make any proposals or take any initiatives.
- Upon the request of class teachers, they assist with the organization of field trips, events, and clean-up days.
- They do not know their statutory rights.
- They do not keep their own minutes.
- They do not participate in Pedagogical Council meetings.
- Their participation in the Governance Board is formal in nature.
- Parents avoid speaking up about teachers' shortcomings, fearing their children will be targeted.

Real self-governance is absent in Student Councils.

- Meetings are convened and chaired by vice-principals for Specialized Educational Support Services or by organizers of educational work.
- Students do not come up with independent initiatives.
- They do not know their statutory rights.
- They do not keep their own minutes.
- They do not make independent decisions.
- Committees are either not formed at all, or they are formally established but are not actually functioning.
- They do not run programs aimed at the development of the school or the community.

2.2 | Bullying and cases of violence

Bullying, which often occurs as repeated aggressive behavior by one or more individuals toward another person, is a serious social problem that leaves a deep mark on both the victims and the perpetrators, or “bullies.” This phenomenon, unfortunately, is widespread among a range of age groups, from the school setting to online platforms and workplaces. Violence, with its varying physical, psychological, and emotional manifestations, is a more severe and harmful form of bullying.

Cases of bullying and violence not only violate an individual’s rights and dignity but also lead to serious psychological consequences. In addition, bullying can negatively affect academic progress, efficient work, and general health.

As we know, there is almost no research or statistics on bullying in the Republic of Armenia, which hinders a clear understanding of the phenomenon’s prevalence, as well as the attitudes toward it and the efforts aimed preventing it. Within the scope of the Reducing Bullying in General Education Schools program, a study was conducted in collaboration with the Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center and a Swedish organization called Global to Local. The results (https://hmk.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Bullying_rep.pdf, [Armenian version](#)) confirm that school is the most common setting for this phenomenon. The presence of bullying in school is caused not only by the presence of children from different families but also by teachers’ erroneous approaches and choices of work models.

In an effort to tackle the aforementioned problem, some government agencies, such as the Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center (RPPC), the Human Rights Defender’s office (HRDO), as well as NGOs and private organizations, are actively working within their mandates to organize the movement against bullying, hate speech, intolerance, and discrimination. In this context, meetings, awareness campaigns (https://ombuds.am/en_us/site/ViewNews/3206), courses, and other events have been organized.

Considering the widespread nature and harmful consequences of bullying and violence, the phenomenon requires in-depth study, and the development and implementation of a clear action plan.

| Policy recommendations

- 1.** It is urgent to adopt regulatory documents to prevent cases of bullying and to provide the necessary instructions to administrative and pedagogical staff.
- 2.** Educational and social bodies must develop a procedure for coordinated actions to proactively prevent and overcome cases of bullying and violence.
- 3.** It is necessary to organize awareness events about different forms of violence for all stakeholders in the education system.
- 4.** Practical training is needed on all types of bullying, cyberbullying, and violence.
- 5.** It is necessary to provide separate instruction sheets on how to work with cases of bullying and violence for all positions in a general education institution.

3



Social Justice in the Education System

Education is one of the pillars of modern society, allowing individuals to develop their potential, acquire knowledge and skills, and play an active role in social life. In this context, the principles of social justice gain a central importance in the education system. A just education system must provide equal opportunities for all children and young people, regardless of their social, economic, or cultural background.

This study aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities of social justice in the Armenian education system. It addresses issues such as the accessibility of education for different groups, inequality in the quality of education, and the impact of educational policy on social inequality.

3.1 | Accessibility of kindergartens in Armenia

This section of the report is based on a corresponding study conducted in 2023 by the Asparez Journalists' Club for the Educational Congress 2024, and on previous research.

Levon Barseghyan
Asparez Journalists' Club

| Classification of issues in preliminary education, statistical data

1. The majority of communities in the Republic of Armenia do not register children of preschool age, saying that this function is beyond their mandate. Community municipalities are mostly unaware of the number of children not receiving preschool education, and completely uninformed when it comes to the number of children attending alternative preschools (established by foundations, NGOs, private individuals, etc.), and their categorization by type. Meanwhile, Article 25 of the RA Law "On Preschool Education" enshrines the powers of regional governors and heads of the local self-government bodies in the area of preschool education. Specifically, according to the requirements of this law, they are obliged to keep a record of children of preschool age. Some community municipality employees report that they do not have guidelines or registers for recording children of preschool age.
2. For decades, preschool education in Armenia has, by and large, been neglected. While preschool education has been handed over to community authorities, sufficient financial resources have not been allocated to provide this service with adequate scope and quality. No legal mechanisms have been created to enable local self-government bodies to have such incomes and to form institutional mechanisms to provide preschool education in the community for all children of preschool age. As a result, the provision of preschool education services in communities has been variable. Its provision has depended on the discretion of the community authority – should they allocate some of the scarce community funds to providing preschool education or use them for other services? In some communities, more attention has been paid to this topic by the local authority, in others less, while small communities have not enjoyed this service at all.
3. The right to preschool education has been violated at the state level unintentionally, but it has been a case of widespread and multi-layered discrimination. In particular,

- 3.1. Thanks to the abundance of financial resources and a decision by their Council of Elders, the Yerevan city authority has been able to provide free preschool education services to children for more than a decade, a number of large communities have provided this for a fee, but in most communities this service was not provided at all. The problem of providing preschool education services in communities has been and remains significantly linked to the inequitable development of communities, the country's tradition of hyper-centralized governance, and the disproportionate funding of communities by state authorities. This is unjust from the perspective of the State's obligation and constitutional need to ensure the legal equality of Armenia's citizens.
- 3.2. The costs borne by families using the services of fee-based community-owned kindergartens increase with the direct expenses for preschool education, unlike families using the services of free kindergartens.
- 3.3. In families of children deprived of preschool education, the burden of childcare further complicates their social and living conditions. In such families, one family member is forced to stay home to care for the child, thus ending up deprived of a potential job and income.
- 3.4. When they start the first grade, there is a significant difference in the behavior, knowledge, ability to grasp academic content, and quality of interactions with other children between the children who have received preschool education and those who have not. This circumstance has not been closely studied in Armenia, but it is assumed that receiving or not receiving preschool education affects the quality of school learning for several years.
4. The number of children deprived of preschool education is unclear when categorized by their reasons for not attending preschool, such as: (1) physical distance from a preschool institution, (2) inability to pay the tuition fee, (3) low level of trust in preschool institutions, (4) attitudes of parents of children with disabilities, and so on. There is no professional assessment of the weighting associated with these reasons.
5. There is a lack of clarity around the quantitative and categorized statistical data of preschools and kindergartens operating in Armenia besides the kindergartens founded as NGOs and the preschools operating adjunct to state-run schools, including the number of children attending them.
6. The quantitative, geographical, and qualitative indicators of preschool education services depend significantly on the country's natural setting and climatic conditions. Settlements and preschool institutions in Armenia are located at an altitude of 500-2200m above sea level, which leads to a significant difference in the maintenance costs of kindergartens. Kindergartens located at lower altitudes operate for 8-10 months a year thanks to lower heating costs and easier road accessibility in winter, while kindergartens at higher altitudes operate for 3-5 months due to high heating costs and difficult or impassable roads in winter.

7. Depending on budgetary availability in a community, kindergartens operate with different schedules. In some cases, they operate for 3-4 hours per day and the children do not take a nap, while in others the schedule covers 7-8 hours.
8. In large settlements, despite the existence of kindergartens, they are insufficient to ensure uninterrupted preschool education for all children there. As a result, children are placed on waiting lists until a spot becomes available. In particular, the majority of children of preschool age in Yerevan are on a waiting list, and only 5-6-year-olds attend kindergarten.
9. Despite the Government's programs and promises to build, renovate, and repair 500 kindergartens, and despite the fact that work is proceeding intensively on this front in Armenia, what remains unclear and problematic is how local self-government bodies will cover the operating and maintenance costs of these kindergartens. Community budgets (with the exception of the capital city, where the per capita community budget (calculated without state education and health expenses) is 2-3 times that of other communities) are too poor to take on this additional burden, and the prospect of maintaining newly constructed kindergartens is particularly risky. One cannot rule out that such operations may be impossible to finance from the community budget in many cases. There are examples of such precedents.
10. The ongoing financing for the maintenance and upkeep of community kindergartens (staff, utility costs, food, development expenses – training, teaching materials, books, games, etc.) is covered by community budgets, which are too scarce to attract qualified specialists and provide good quality service. Proof of the scarcity of community budgets is also the fact that preschool education is fee-based (with the exception of Yerevan where it is free for children registered in Yerevan). The overwhelming majority of staff lists for kindergartens registered as NGOs in Armenia specify a salary of 70,000-120,000 AMD for all positions, including all mandatory state payments and income tax. Such salaries do not attract qualified candidates with relevant education and skills, especially when one full-time equivalent is often distributed between two or more employees.

Data based on official sources, 2022					
Community/ region	No. of children aged 2-6 years, 2021	Number of 2-6-year-old children attending 957 NGO/ SNCOs, preschools attached to schools (including departmental), and non- state (licensed) preschools in RA		Number of children not receiving preschool education in NGOs, SNCOs attached to schools (including departmental), and non-state (licensed) preschools. There is no information on how many of these children attend unlicensed private kindergartens or development centers.	
	մարդ	մարդ	%	մարդ	%
Yerevan	74042	28309	38,2%	45733	61.8%
Aragatsotn	8137	2206	27,1%	5931	72.9%
Ararat	17276	6250	36,2%	11026	63.8%
Armavir	16099	6348	39,4%	9751	60.6%
Gegharkunik	14402	4024	27,9%	10378	72.1%
Lori	13925	5034	36,2%	8891	63.8%
Kotayk	16545	6402	38,7%	10143	61.3%
Shirak	15518	4823	31,1%	10695	68.9%
Syunik	7035	4406	62,6%	2629	37.4%
Vayots Dzor	2856	1408	49,3%	1448	50.7%
Tavush	6807	3342	49,1%	3465	50.9%
Total, RA	192642	72552	37,7%	120090	62.3%

According to data from the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports in August 2024:

Out of 109,719 children aged 0-2 years, 5,832 (5.3%) are enrolled in preschool education. Out of 110,314 children aged 3-5, this number is 78,323 (71%).

In regional kindergartens, there are 45,846 children, while this number is 26,700 for Yerevan kindergartens, 6,288 in preschools, and 5,321 in private kindergartens.

In order to acquire information on the number and location of settlements that do not have preschool educational institutions, it is necessary to contact the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure.

The RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports does not maintain official statistics on the number of children aged 3-6 who are not enrolled in preschool education, or on their reasons for not being enrolled.

As of August 2024, community municipalities do not have information on how many children of preschool age living in their community do not attend kindergarten or receive any other preschool education, while not on a waiting list to attend a community kindergarten.

Shirak region

- **Gyumri**
1 settlement with a total of 24 kindergartens, 2,516 children enrolled and 145 on the waiting list.
- **Artik**
24 settlements with a total of 16 kindergartens, 11 settlements without a kindergarten, 1,008 children enrolled, 189 on the waiting list.
- **Ani**
19 settlements with a total of 3 kindergartens, 16 settlements without a kindergarten, 248 children enrolled, 83 on the waiting list.
- **Amasia**
26 settlements with a total of 1 kindergarten, 25 settlements without a kindergarten, 74 children enrolled, 6 on the waiting list.
- **Ashotsk**
25 settlements with a total of 1 kindergarten, 24 settlements without a kindergarten, 79 children enrolled, 16 on the waiting list.
- **Akhuryan**
35 settlements with a total of 19 kindergartens, 18 settlements without a kindergarten, 854 children enrolled, 125 on the waiting list.

Overall in the Shirak region, there are 130 settlements with a total of 64 kindergartens, 94 settlements do not have a kindergarten.

There are 4,779 children enrolled in a kindergarten in the Shirak region, and 564 are on the waiting list.

Tavush region

- **Berd**
17 settlements with a total of 17 kindergartens, 1 settlement without a kindergarten, 110 children enrolled, 165 children on the waiting list.
- **Dilijan**
9 settlements with a total of 8 kindergartens, 6 settlements without a kindergarten, 357 children enrolled, 44 children on the waiting list.
- **Ijevan**
20 settlements with a total of 16 kindergartens, 5 settlements without a kindergarten, 937 children enrolled, 109 children on the waiting list.
- **Noyemberyan**
19 settlements with a total of 13 kindergartens, 7 settlements without a kindergarten, 435 children enrolled, 88 children on the waiting list.

Overall in the Tavush region, there are 65 settlements with a total of 54 kindergartens, 19 settlements do not have a kindergarten.

There are a total of 1,839 children enrolled in kindergarten in the Tavush region, and 406 are on the waiting list.

Ararat region

- **Ararat**
13 settlements with a total of 11 kindergartens, 5 settlements without a kindergarten, 1132 children enrolled, 89 children on the waiting list.
- **Artashat**
39 settlements with a total of 34 kindergartens, 14 settlements without a kindergarten, 188 children enrolled, 659 children on the waiting list.
- **Masis**
27 settlements with a total of 27 kindergartens, 5 settlements without a kindergarten, 2194 children enrolled, 872 children on the waiting list.
- **Vedi**
19 settlements with a total of 16 kindergartens, 7 settlements without a kindergarten, 773 children enrolled, 407 children on the waiting list.

- **Verin Dvin**

1 settlement without a kindergarten.

Overall in the Ararat region, there are 99 settlements with a total of 88 kindergartens, 32 settlements do not have a kindergarten.

There are a total of 5,987 children enrolled in kindergarten in the Ararat region, and 2027 are on the waiting list.

Gegharkunik region

- **Gavar**

12 settlements with a total of 15 kindergartens, 3 settlements without a kindergarten, 279 children enrolled, 136 children on the waiting list.

- **Martuni**

17 settlements with a total of 15 kindergartens, 5 settlements without a kindergarten, 1175 children enrolled, 402 children on the waiting list.

- **Chambarak**

12 settlements with a total of 6 kindergartens, 8 settlements without a kindergarten, 180 children enrolled, 75 children on the waiting list

- **Sevan**

12 settlements with a total of 14 kindergartens, 1 settlement without a kindergarten, 999 children enrolled, 127 children on the waiting list.

- **Vardenis**

35 settlements with a total of 12 kindergartens, 26 settlements without a kindergarten, 334 children enrolled, 58 children on the waiting list.

Overall in the Gegharkunik region, there are 88 settlements with a total of 62 kindergartens, 43 settlements do not have a kindergarten.

There are a total of 2,967 children enrolled in kindergarten in the Gegharkunik region, and 798 are on the waiting list.

Vayots Dzor region

- **Yeghegnadzor**

5 settlements with a total of 8 kindergartens covering all the settlements, 306 children enrolled, 156 children on the waiting list.

- **Jermuk**

3 settlements with a total of 2 kindergartens, 1 settlement without a kindergarten, 151 children enrolled, 13 children on the waiting list.

- **Areni**

11 settlements with a total of 3 kindergartens, 18 settlements without a kindergarten, 255 children enrolled, 16 children on the waiting list.

- **Vayk**

20 բնակավայր, 3 մանկապարտեզ, 18 բնակավայրում մանկապարտեզ չկա, հաճախում է 255 երեխա, հերթագրված է 16 երեխա,

- **Yeghegis**

16 settlements without any kindergartens.

Overall in the Vayots Dzor region, there are 55 settlements with a total of 18 kindergartens, 41 settlements do not have a kindergarten.

There are a total of 735 children enrolled in kindergarten in the Vayots Dzor region, and 261 are on the waiting list.

Syunik region

- **Goris**

13 settlements with a total of 13 kindergartens, 7 settlements without a kindergarten, 834 children enrolled, 201 children on the waiting list.

- **Kapan**

39 settlements with a total of 18 kindergartens, 34 settlements without a kindergarten, 1628 children enrolled, 135 children on the waiting list.

- **Meghri**

15 settlements with a total of 8 kindergartens, 10 settlements without a kindergarten, 385 children enrolled, 54 children on the waiting list.

- **Sisian**

36 settlements with a total of 22 kindergartens, 17 settlements without a kindergarten, 711 children enrolled, 120 children on the waiting list.

- **Kajaran**

21 settlements with a total of 2 kindergartens, 19 settlements without a kindergarten, 122 children enrolled, 10 children on the waiting list.

- **STatev**

8 settlements with a total of 5 kindergartens, 3 settlements without a kindergarten, 0 children enrolled, 0 children on the waiting list, these are all preschools.

- **Tegh**

7 settlements with a total of 2 kindergartens, 5 settlements without a kindergarten, 60 children enrolled, 12 children on the waiting list.

Overall in the Syunik region, there are 139 settlements with a total of 70 kindergartens, 95 settlements do not have a kindergarten.

There are a total of 3,740 children enrolled in kindergarten in the Syunik region, and 532 are on the waiting list.

| Policy recommendations to secure accessibility to preliminary education

Recommendations to the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports:

1. Develop and use legal acts to implement guidelines and registers for local self-governing (LSG) bodies to register children of preschool age. Ensure proper oversight of LSG bodies to regularly carry out the registration of children of preschool age.
2. Regularly maintain a record of children of preschool age in the Republic of Armenia, ensuring clear statistical data on their educational status based on geography, settlements, educational institutions, special needs, ethnic belonging, and so on.

Recommendations to the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure:

1. Establish oversight of communities' process for registering and keeping records on children of preschool age and providing information on those not receiving preschool education. Twice a year, the official website of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure should publish the number of children of preschool age registered in communities and the reasons why they do not receive preschool education.
2. In Article 46, point 1, part 3 of the RA Law "On Local Self-Government," it is stated that the community leader registers school-aged children and ensures their enrollment in an educational institution. A similar requirement for registering children of preschool age has been omitted from this law.

To Local Self-Governing Bodies: city councils, community leaders, and the Mayor of Yerevan:

1. Mandatorily include the reasons for those children that do not attend preschool educational institutions in the registers developed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports. Until the Ministry creates a template for registration, independently create registers and record all children of preschool age, including those attending all alternative preschool institutions. Update this register at least once a semester.
2. Conduct a needs assessment of preschool education for all children of preschool age registered in the community, create accessible programs for everyone, make preliminary calculations, include this in the community development program and annual work plans, and raise funds for this purpose by appealing to the RA Government, state, non-state, local, and international foundations and philanthropists.

3. Initiate and continuously work with the Members of Parliament at the RA National Assembly, the RA Government, the Prime Minister, relevant officials of the Ministries of Education and Territorial Administration, the expert community, and specialized civil society organizations to change the legislation on financial equalization for communities and achieve real equalization, as well as to create and implement mechanisms to ensure preschool education for all children in the Republic of Armenia under equally fair conditions. Discrimination in the accessibility of preschool education must no longer be tolerated.

To the RA National Assembly and its committees:

1. To the RA NA Standing Committee on Territorial Administration, Local Self-Government, Agriculture and Environmental Protection and the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, reword Article 46, part 1, point 3 of the RA Law "On Local Self-Government" by adding the word "preschool". The new wording should be: "...Conducts the registration of children of school and preschool age and ensures their enrollment in educational institutions."
2. To the RA NA Standing Committee on Territorial Administration, Local Self-Government, Agriculture and Environmental Protection; the Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sports; and the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs, in collaboration with the RA Government and the Ministries of Education and Territorial Administration, develop a concept, strategy, and roadmap for the real proportional development of communities, the real decentralization of RA governance, and the development of community financing mechanisms, and implement it. The primary goal of this mechanism should be to eliminate all forms of discrimination in the preliminary education system and ensure preliminary education for all children under equally fair conditions. Until this concept is developed:
 - 2.1. In cooperation with the Government, ensure mechanisms to fill vacant spots in existing kindergartens with children who do not attend kindergarten and to equalize educational conditions. This includes:
 - 2.2. Providing daily transportation for children and their guardians from their place of residence to the place of study and back, at the expense of the state or communities, and equalizing or eliminating tuition fees everywhere.
 - 2.3. In all settlements where children are not included in the previous group, organize preschool education attached to SNCO schools using state or community funds. If this is not possible, organize home-based or club-based preschool education services.
3. To the RA National Assembly, designate preschool education in Armenia as a mandatory service provided to the public and, accordingly, ensure preschool education for all preschool-aged children through all possible means.

3.2 | The physical accessibility of schools

This section of the report is based on a study conducted by the Disability Rights Agenda NGO for the Educational Congress 2024 and on the analysis of the materials mentioned below

Mushegh Hovsepyan
Disability Rights Agenda NGO

| General description of processes with details on characteristic trends

Accessibility, including physical accessibility, is a prerequisite for children with disabilities to be able to enjoy their right to education on an equal basis with others.¹ Despite Armenia's policy of inclusion since the early 2000s, the physical accessibility of general education schools remains a challenge for students with disabilities.

According to official statistics, there are around 200,000 people with disabilities living in Armenia, including about 10,000 children.² Although legislation has improved over time, including the adoption of the 2007 "Accessibility of Buildings and Structures for Groups of People with Limited Mobility"³ and the 2014 "Buildings for General Education"⁴ construction norms, many general education schools still do not meet the necessary accessibility standards for inclusion. These physical barriers not only violate the right to education but also hinder the ability of students to live independently and be included in their communities.

From 2007 to 2017, more than 500 schools were built and renovated, ensuring a certain level of accessibility.⁵ Currently, the RA Government plans to repair, build, and renovate 300 schools and 500 kindergartens by 2026.⁶

1 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, general principle 2 (2014), paragraph 1.

2 Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun sotsial-tntesakan vichaky 2024 tvakani hunvar-hunisin. Teghakatvakan amsakan hashvetvutyun (The Socio-Economic Situation of the Republic of Armenia in January-June 2024: Informational Monthly Report), Yerevan, 2024, pp. 189 and 193, (<https://armstat.am/am/?nid=82&id=2669>) (in Armenian).

3 Order of the RA Minister of Urban Development No. 253-N of November 10, 2006, (<https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=181151>) (in Armenian).

4 Order of the RA Minister of Urban Development No. 103-N of April 9, 2014, (<https://www.google.com/search?q=https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx%3FDocID%3D186844>) (in Armenian).

5 Disability and Inclusive Development NGO, *Hanrakrtakan dprotsneri matcheliutyuny orenky gortznakanum* (Accessibility of General Education Schools: The Law in Practice), Yerevan, 2018, (<https://www.google.com/search?q=https://transparency.am/files/publications/1547306001-0-256208.pdf%3Ffbclid%3DIwAR3MiOnpvCkGNSsz0gkzxW-nAJvtpxWjy0j2vjn0PniiKWjxBVdF1ULIB5Q>) (in Armenian).

6 RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports, *300 dprots, 500 mankapartez tzhagirn yntatski mej e* (The "300 Schools, 500 Kindergartens" Program is Underway), 2023, (<https://escs.am/am/news/17749>)(<https://escs.am/am/news/17749>) (in Armenian)

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education, which is also reflected in international obligations such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the provision of accessibility and investments for this purpose remain slow and unsystematic.

Data, facts, specific issues, and developments

Positive Developments

1. Construction norms for accessibility have been in effect since 2007, and they also apply to general education schools. They include standards for ramps, elevators, accessible entrances, and sanitary facilities, which are designed for people with disabilities, including people with visual problems.
2. General education schools now receive 3 million AMD from the state budget for improving physical environment accessibility.^{7,8} This is a significant step forward to ensure schools have the necessary resources to make infrastructural changes.

Negative Developments

1. Despite increased funding, many schools lack the technical knowledge to properly ensure accessibility. The Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center has developed a specific guideline,⁹ which is a positive but insufficient measure for this purpose. Without a systemic mechanism for technical support, schools adapt their environments to the accessibility standards. There is a high risk that the funding will be used for improvements that do not match these standards.
2. The lack of monitoring systems for accessibility in the country remains problematic. There is no monitoring mechanism to oversee how schools use these funds or whether their efforts comply with accessibility standards. The inspection bodies for urban development, technical, and fire safety are ineffective in this regard. In 2023, inspections only recorded two violations of accessibility requirements.¹⁰

7 RA Government Decision No. 1481-N of September 22, 2022, (<https://www.google.com/search?q=https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx%3Fdocid%3D190047>) (in Armenian)

8 RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports, Finansavorman nor modeli nerdrumy kta barelavel nerarakan krtutyan voraky. Araksya Svajyan (The Introduction of a New Funding Model Will Allow for the Improvement of Inclusive Education Quality: Araksia Svajyan,) 2023, (https://escs.am/am/news/17740?fbclid=IwAR3XyKYxNzLEFz0b6eXrGzeJM_IzLrDC8iEv1KdLr-7PWBjJK-oFlocmWLI) (in Armenian)

9 Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center, Fizikakan mijavayri harmarutyunner: Metodakan ughetsuyts (Physical Environment Adaptations: Methodological Guideline), (<https://hmk.am/hratarakutyunner-2023/>) (in Armenian).

10 Disability Rights Agenda NGO, February 23, 2023 publication, (<https://www.facebook.com/>) (in Armenian).

| Policy and action recommendations

To overcome these challenges and ensure full accessibility for schools, the following actions are proposed:

1. Create a dedicated mechanism for accessibility monitoring, which would also cover general education schools and evaluate whether the financial resources allocated for their accessibility are being used appropriately.
2. Given the very small number of specialists, establish a centralized technical support mechanism. This could include forming a team of experts who could help schools plan and make changes that comply with current accessibility standards.

3.3 | Educational progress and poverty

This section of the report is based on a study conducted for the Educational Congress 2024, as well as on the analysis of other reports and statistical data.

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Teach for Armenia Educational Foundation

The link between educational outcomes and poverty is a well-documented topic (Gorski, 2018; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013; Raffo et al., 2009; Engle & Black, 2008). Research shows that socio-economically disadvantaged children are at a greater risk of not achieving success in school compared to their more affluent peers (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Engle & Black, 2008; Mowat, 2020). Moreover, the difference in educational outcomes between poor children and those who are not is a global phenomenon, encompassing both developed and developing countries (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007; Engle & Black, 2008; Reay, 2017). This does not mean that less affluent children always perform worse, but rather that the risk of them not succeeding is greater.

In the Armenian context as well, studies have shown that there is a difference in success rates between students from low and high socioeconomic backgrounds (Caro & He, 2018; He & Caro, 2018; Daveyan, 2019). Caro and He (2018) use Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) data to measure this difference from 2003-2015. They find that children from lower-income families scored significantly lower in mathematics and science compared to their more affluent peers. Furthermore, the difference in levels of success increased over time, as the gap was smaller in 2003 compared to 2015 (Caro & He, 2018). The authors also emphasize that socioeconomic status is not the only determining factor for educational success, as some children from poor families also received high grades in exams. Finally, the study shows that there is also a difference in success between urban and rural areas, with children in cities outperforming children in villages in mathematics and science (ibid.).

| Poverty in Armenia

Poverty is a widely discussed topic among scholars, politicians, and policymakers (Alcock, 1997). There are various definitions, concepts, and complex ideas of poverty that help in understanding this phenomenon, and the definitions often “cross over and sometimes contradict each other” (Alcock, 1997, p.4). One way to look at poverty is in economic terms, by

measuring an individual's income and necessary expenses for food and some non-food items (Engle & Black, 2008; Lampert et al., 2020). However, many scholars and poverty researchers emphasize that material deprivation is just one measure of poverty and does not reflect the complexity of the issue.

To present child poverty in Armenia, the UNICEF report *The State of Child Poverty in Armenia* (2016) was used, which is based on data from official sources of Armenia's national poverty statistics (Living Condition Survey 2013, 2014). According to the report, 36% of children living in Armenia are poor in financial terms, and 3% are extremely poor. The report emphasizes that children are most vulnerable to poverty, as 26% of the poor population are children, and in the case of the extremely poor, this is 30%. The child poverty index is high considering that children make up 22% of Armenia's population. The level of poverty in rural communities is significantly higher than in urban areas (UNICEF Armenia, 2016).

To describe the multidimensional nature of poverty, the UNICEF report used the Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA) methodology (UNICEF Armenia, 2016). This framework views poverty in terms of a child's well-being, using measurements of "survival, development, protection, and social participation" (UNICEF Armenia, 2016, p. 8). The measurements are based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989, as cited in UNICEF Armenia, 2016).

The UNICEF report (2016) shows that 64% of children living in Armenia are vulnerable in two or more measures, while about 90% are vulnerable in at least one measure. There is a significant difference in the vulnerability of children in rural and urban areas. While about half of children living in cities are vulnerable in two or more measures, in rural areas, this indicator is about 80%. In villages, almost every child is vulnerable in at least one measure, while in cities, this indicator decreases to 82%. Children in rural areas are significantly more vulnerable in terms of available utility services and information compared to children in cities. Nonetheless, there are also significant differences in the areas of clothing, social relations, and early childhood education and care.

| Teachers and teaching

It is important to understand how explanations of poverty and the ideology of poverty are related to teachers and teaching. Many scholars and academics who work on the topics of poverty and educational success emphasize:

- a)** Teachers' profound understanding of how poverty can affect children and their educational outcomes.
- b)** Teachers' conceptual understanding of the causes of poverty (Books, 2004; Gorski, 2008; Rogalsky, 2009).

They highlight that only with a detailed understanding of poverty can teachers adapt appropriate strategies and classroom practices to work effectively with disadvantaged children.

In Armenia, almost no teacher training or in-service training programs address the topic of the impact of poverty on student success, despite the country's high child poverty rate (Overview of BA or MA degree curricula at leading pedagogical universities and degrees, and overview of in-service teacher training curricula, 2019).

| Action recommendations

1. Considering the importance of the topic and the prevalence of the problem, it is recommended to include the impact of inequality and poverty on children in teacher training and in-service training programs. Moreover, it is important to provide teachers with the necessary tools and methods to work with children living in poverty.
2. It is necessary to strengthen the cooperation between schools and social services, as well as psycho-pedagogical bodies, to provide fast and targeted support to children from vulnerable families.

3.4 | Indicators for the provision of nutrition in schools

This section of the report is based on studies and data analysis from the School Nutrition and Child Wellbeing organization of the National Center for Educational Development and Innovation (NCEDI) Foundation, conducted for the Educational Congress 2024.

Satenik Mkrtchyan, Armen Mkrtchyan

School Nutrition and Child Wellbeing Organization (NCEDI Foundation)

| General description of processes

Since 2010, in collaboration with the UN World Food Programme and the Russian Branch Institute of Nutrition, with financial assistance from the Russian Federation and contributions from the RA state budget, the RA Government has implemented a program called Nutrition in Schools. This program is aimed at ensuring healthy nutrition for schoolchildren in the regions of Armenia, as well as creating an accessible and sustainable national school nutrition program. Since 2023, the program has been fully financed by the RA state budget.

Currently, the beneficiaries of the program consist of about 108,000 students in elementary school and 4,600 students from preschools, who have the opportunity to receive one balanced, healthy, warm meal per day at school. In the limited number of schools where it is not possible to provide a warm meal due to issues related to the space, infrastructure, or other temporary technical causes, a dry meal option is offered.

Training has been provided and continues to be delivered to cooks working at the schools and school principals as well as teachers and parents from all regions, making knowledge available on organizing nutrition in schools, procurement processes, food safety, sanitary and hygienic standards, healthy diet, prevention of diet-related diseases, practical cooking, and other important topics. Cooks working in schools have not only received jobs over the years but also professional skills and opportunities for specialization.

In the vast majority of schools, infrastructure has been provided for cooking hot meals, and solar panels have been installed in some schools. Innovative school-based greenhouses and intensive gardens have been developed and are being successfully managed.

To support the implementation of the program, the RA Government created the Sustainable School Nutrition Foundation in 2016, which was renamed the National Center for Educational Development and Innovation Foundation in 2020. The School Nutrition and Child Wellbeing organization was set up within its structure.

What started with six types of food 10 years ago has now reached a full menu with over 20 food items.

| Positive aspects of the Nutrition in Schools program:

1. **Expanded reach:** About 108,000 children in elementary school and 4,600 children in preschools across more than 1,000 schools in 10 regions of Armenia receive a healthy, balanced meal.
2. **Quality assurance:** The school meal menu was developed by nutritionists in accordance with international standards, which ensures that children receive the necessary nutrients for their health.
3. **Social justice:** The program contributes to the establishment of social equality by ensuring that all children in elementary school, regardless of their social conditions, receive healthy food and have the opportunity to eat together in school under equal conditions.
4. **Improved Infrastructure:** The joint work of the UN World Food Programme and the RA Government has resulted in the renovation, revitalization, or creation of school cafeterias and kitchens.
5. **Special menus:** The specific needs of children with health problems have been considered in developing the program, which provides appropriate food to these children.
6. **Systemic change:** Monitoring by the SNCW in the NCEDI helps schools implement the program. It also helps the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports improve certain shortcomings of the program. It contributes to the spread of concepts in healthy eating.
7. **New Job Opportunities:** The program allows women in the community to acquire cooking skills, which opens up new job opportunities. Thanks to the program, many women living in the regions of Armenia get the opportunity to work, which raises their social status.
8. **Educational significance:** The program's involvement in the educational system is an important step; it not only provides children with healthy food but also gives them foundational knowledge about a healthy lifestyle.
9. **Social support:** Access to food in schools also has a social impact, aimed at overcoming poverty, creating social equality, and reducing the financial burden on families.
10. **Raised food standards:** The menu of the Nutrition in Schools program is developed based on international standards, ensuring that children's needs for healthy nutrition are met.

11. **Vitamin balance:** The food offered within the program includes a variety of fruits and vegetables, which ensures that children receive the necessary vitamins.
12. **Limits in salt and sugar:** The program has strict limitations on the use of added sugar and salt – 0 grams of added sugar and 1.5 grams of iodized salt.
13. **Use of whole-grain flour:** The use of whole-grain cereals ensures a higher nutritional value. Schools in three regions of Armenia receive whole-grain flour, and bread is baked with this flour, meaning that 50% of the carbohydrates are provided by whole-grain flour.
14. **Training and practical courses:** The cooks participating in the program undergo training, which improves the quality of food preparation. Courses are organized for parents to be a full member of the Family-School-NCEDI triangle and provide children with proper nutrition. Courses are also conducted for primary school teachers to have a positive impact on the organizational work of children receiving the food. Courses are also attended by representatives of the administrative staff of the schools, and by gardeners as well in those schools where greenhouses or intensive gardens have been established.
15. **Consideration of local specificities:** The implementation of the program is systematic, as a result of which all schools receive the same food, but there are certain differences based on local requirements. The menu accounts for local dietary habits, such that food types are presented that are accessible and acceptable to the children in that area. The developed mandatory menu offers alternatives to schools based on the region, possibilities, and supplies, which is also done in accordance with scientifically established norms.
16. **Promotion of a healthy lifestyle:** The program promotes the ideas of a healthy lifestyle, as well as educational and social development, thanks to which children learn the importance of a proper diet. The program's component dedicated to healthy eating in the mandatory healthy lifestyle club curriculum is closely linked to the school's cafeteria infrastructure.
17. **Green technologies and promotion of local production:** Thanks to the program, green technologies are used in schools in the form of greenhouses, intensive gardens, and berry patches. This, in addition to providing environmentally clean food, also generates great interest among schoolchildren in agriculture and innovative methods.

| Issues and challenges

1. **Supply chain disruptions:** Some schools, especially those with small student populations and those located far from urban areas, sometimes face problems with food supplies. The fact that these schools are remote and hard to reach often makes it difficult to organize deliveries. In cases where suppliers are not acting in good faith, the options for recourse under current legislation often leave schools facing the problem of a disrupted daily menu.
2. **Issues with children with disabilities:** For children with disabilities, the accessibility of cafeterias, just like with other school infrastructure, is problematic, and this negatively affects their access to nutrition. In cases of children with musculoskeletal disorders, the general problems of physical accessibility also apply to cafeterias. In such cases, local solutions are varied but not systemic. Kitchen staff lack the skills to respond appropriately to the special needs of students and have not received training on the minimum norms for appropriate attitudes toward children with basic differences when it comes to co-existence and development.
3. **Issues with children left out of the program due to homeschooling:** Children in homeschooling arrangements are effectively left out of the program, which leads to the neglect of their nutritional needs.
4. **From 2025, the new version of the Minister of Health's Order N-32 will be in effect.** The current menu, although in conformity in terms of calorie count, needs certain changes, specifically to alter how frequently vegetables, dairy products, poultry, and bread are used.
5. **The issue of Yerevan being excluded from the program:** Yerevan has been completely excluded from the program. Research and program discussions are being conducted by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports and its partners. The issue here is not only about per-child funding but also about infrastructure preparation. Yerevan also needs to go through a large-scale phase of creating and improving this infrastructure.
6. **The problem of providing food for older schoolchildren:** Children in higher grades cannot use the cafeteria, which creates an issue of fairness. For example, a 5th-grader who finished 4th grade just 2-3 months ago can no longer use the cafeteria. Work is now underway to develop and pilot models for providing food to high school students.
7. **Issues with food preparation:** In some schools, for various reasons (lack of water, lack of sanitation, impossibility of kitchen operations, etc.), it is not possible to provide hot meals, and children are given dry food. These cases are limited in number, but action is needed to provide the possibility of hot meals in such cases through more flexible models.
8. **Procurement process issues:** Shortcomings in the procurement system also have an impact on the organization of the process. Bad-faith suppliers and shortcomings in the procurement system often cause disruptions.

9. **Issues with ensuring the stability of cooks' jobs:** At the beginning of the program's implementation, the cooks were women from the communities who did the work of preparing meals in exchange for certain remuneration. Today, they receive detailed guidelines and technological sheets from the SNCW organization, and courses are regularly organized. They are also included in the school's staff through a temporary employment contract, which also creates certain problems in terms of staff turnover and job stability.

| Policy and action recommendations

1. Support for local production and efforts to reduce supply-related risks

A policy of introducing various tools is necessary to encourage the use of local production, thereby creating a cycle of investment in communities and supporting a sustainable agricultural economy. For example, such a tool could be setting a threshold for the amount of produce consumed from local producers (following the example of Brazil)

2. Improvement of necessary infrastructure

Work on improving school cafeteria infrastructure must continue to ensure that children enjoy equal access and equal conditions. Since the program's implementation, many schools have already needed to modernize their cafeterias. Therefore, it is necessary to take steps and develop programs for cafeteria modernization, like, for example, a project implemented in the Shirak region that gave schools the opportunity to modernize and supplement their kitchen and cafeteria equipment. In schools where dry food is still provided, it is necessary to introduce different cafeteria models, such as modular cafeterias or other formats, so that children attending these schools can also have the opportunity for hot meals. Within the framework of the "300 schools, 500 kindergartens" program, the Government plans to provide modern cafeterias and kitchens in newly built schools with all the necessary infrastructure and equipment for providing hot meals.

3. Improvement of the management system, digitization, and implementation of an electronic management system

Investments should be made in the digitization of the program for effective organization, quick communication of menus and guidelines, as well as for optimizing monitoring and feedback, and controlling supplies. The implementation of an electronic management system will also help in collecting data for a waste management system and subsequently introducing such a management system.

4. Menu improvements

The continuous improvement of the menu, the inclusion of additional food types, especially seasonal vegetables and fruits, increasing the portion size of poultry, transitioning to whole grains and reviewing the weight of the bread provided, transitioning to low-fat yogurt and increasing the volume of dairy products, a phased reduction in the use of salt, a reduction in the use of processed foods, and the inclusion of alternative and new dishes are issues that need continuous, phased improvement. The possible limits of improving the menu are depend on available increases to per-child funding. Currently, a menu update is being developed, which should be fully aligned with the requirements of the corresponding order of the Minister of Health.

5. Specialization of school cooks and implementation of a system for cooks' continuous development

It is necessary to take steps to create and widely implement a system for the short-term professional qualification of school cooks, as a continuation of the existing training model. After the creation of the qualification system, a review of the minimum requirements for the staff involved in the program, and consequently, the number of positions and salary rates, will be another guarantee of the program's institutional development.

3.5 | The opportunities for extended-day learning and issues with implementation

This section of the report is based on surveys conducted among school principals for the Educational Congress 2024, as well as on data from a comparative study of various extended-day learning models since 2021.

Vahram Sghomonyan

"Participatory School" Educational Foundation

| General observations

The "Procedure for Organizing Extended-Day Learning in General Education Schools," approved by Order N-38-N of the RA Minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports on October 13, 2020, creates severely limited opportunities for overcoming inequalities in the potential of extended-day learning and the education system. The data studied suggest that:

- The number of students participating in extended-day learning within the framework of the aforementioned procedure is extremely limited.
- In some cases, this format of extended-day learning emphasizes the inequalities of the education system and does not utilize the potential for improving progress, developing collaborative skills, and promoting equal opportunities and justice, as proven by international leading practices.
- Extended-day school concepts developed and implemented by the professional team of the "Participatory School" Educational Foundation, which have been implemented in a number of countries, including Artsakh from 2021-2023, show that extended-day learning provides tangible progress in terms of educational, demographic, and community development and significantly impacts educational outcomes.

The following data from the study speak to the trends mentioned above.

| Organization and funding of extended-day groups based on parental application

Extended-day sessions are conducted on a fee-for-service basis, paid for by parents. The amount of the fee is approved by the institution based on a decision by its Governance Board. Services in the extended-day group may be organized free of charge for students from socially disadvantaged families.

In rural settlements, the majority of parents are unable to pay for this service and, as a result, extended-day groups are not formed, or a group is formed for the whole educational level. While services in extended-day groups may be organized free of charge for students from socially disadvantaged families, it is unclear how this is organized, i.e. whether it is done at the school's expense or with funds from the state budget.

The minimum or maximum fee is not specified in any procedure. The regulations are so unclear and rigid that a significant number of principals do not risk implementing the process.

| Extended-day learning for students with low academic results

1. The difficulty of implementation is primarily related to conducting the extended-day program after the 7th class of the day.
2. The number of allocated hours is sometimes not enough for the implementation of the extended-day program (extended-day sessions can be conducted for a maximum of 2 hours per week at the 1st educational level (elementary) and a maximum of 3 hours per week at the 2nd educational level (basic)).
3. The payment format is not defined.

| Other side effects of the current extended-day learning procedure

Participation in extended-day learning in higher grades can lead to stigmatization and bullying, as everyone is aware that low academic performance serves as the main cause for attending extended-day learning at that age.

Teachers avoid extended-day learning because the hourly wage is only 1000 AMD. This can also contain other risks. For example, a teacher might give a learner high grades on the condition that they then tutor the student at home for a higher fee.

Schools must maintain additional paperwork for extended-day learning. These include an application to the principal, the creation of a thematic plan for that section, and a final report. To avoid all this, they may often simply choose to assign higher grades.

| Comparative analysis with the results of the expanded extended-day school implemented in Artsakh in 2021-2023

With a comprehensive approach from the state and community stakeholders, the experience of extended-day learning in communities with geographical or social difficulties in Artsakh resulted in the following data:

1. The Extended-Day School program was implemented with expanded state support, the involvement of public and community stakeholders, and the participation of all students in targeted schools, based on the principles of solidarity and mutual assistance between communities.
2. Within the framework of the Extended-Day School program, approximately 2,000 students from schools in 18 border communities benefited from expanded extended-day learning in 2021-2023.
3. 97 new jobs were created for teachers and cooks.
4. The expanded extended-day learning included the following for all students in these schools:
 - Two meals a day featuring menus aligned with international standards.
 - A full-day program of support with homework, leisure, sports, and cultural activities on school, community, or other auxiliary premises.

| General observations on the experience of expanded extended-day learning

The results of the conducted surveys revealed that, overall, in all the schools mentioned above, the students, parents, school staff, community residents, and all stakeholders have a positive attitude toward the introduction of extended-day learning. The respondents particularly emphasized the availability of healthy nutrition, support with homework, practical sessions and physical activity in an unconstrained atmosphere, as well as behavioral changes in individual students. The principles of participatory culture, mutual assistance of communities,

self-organization, and the development of knowledge and competences that formed the basis of the Extended-Day School program were applied to varying degrees in a significant portion of the schools.

Extended-day schools have thus taken on a greater role in organizing children's daily lives, the academic and educational process, and working with parents. Several schools have started to work more closely with parents and help them with joint efforts to address issues of academic progress and socio-psychological problems. In some communities, students and parents have started to participate in solving community problems. Particularly interesting experiences were recorded among high school students during extended-day sessions that were practical and project-based.

The following examples of positive experiences were highlighted:

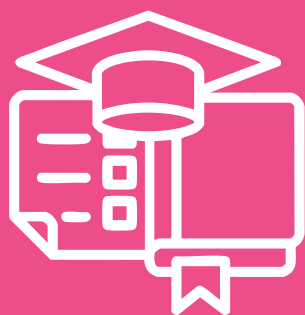
- The successful experience of extended-day coordinators includes the application of a differentiated approach to students and the implementation of individual and group work in an unconstrained atmosphere.
- Extended-day coordinators who used a wide range of methods and techniques were successful. Informal communication, discussions with teachers, and extracurricular and extra-classroom activities had a positive impact on students with special learning needs.
- The coordinators who creatively used the planning freedom offered by the extended-day timetable and organized their work with subject teachers were successful.
- A significant number of subject teachers noted a positive dynamic in students' progress and behavior.
- An increase in student progress was recorded in extended-day learning in schools where the homework for subject classes was harmonized with the extended-day coordinators, supplemented with practical skills.
- The systematization and distribution of assignments in particular for science subjects between subject classes and the extended-day session contributed to the professional strengthening of the coordinators and purposeful work with the students.
- The organization of field trips, project-based classes, and group work within the extended-day framework significantly contributed to the formation of subject-specific and inter-subject competences.
- The kitchen staff primarily followed the work standards and requirements conveyed during training, including those for receiving, storing, processing, and serving the food items specified in the menu.

- As a result of group work, students developed collaborative, participatory, and debating skills.
- Several schools successfully cooperated with art, sports schools, and other cultural and community institutions.
- Some teachers noted that, thanks to this program, the school's educational environment underwent positive changes, which requires new approaches in pedagogy.

| Policy recommendations

1. A comparison of the examples of extended-day learning mentioned above and modern global models shows that the use of expanded extended-day learning in communities with particularly complex geographical and social conditions is necessary from the perspective of strengthening communities and the multi-faceted promotion of territorial development.
2. Based on the above, the "Participatory School" Educational Foundation submitted a program proposal to the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports on April 1, 2024, for the mid-term expenditure program, proposing to implement the extended-day learning model in 40 border schools of the Republic of Armenia.
3. Besides the numerous incentives for participatory education, the model based on solidarity and community development impacts not only educational outcomes and demographic status but also socio-economic indicators, women's employment, and other indicators.
4. Compared to the state and public resources invested, the results obtained are greater and are achieved in a short time frame.

4



Educational Outcomes and Evaluation

This section addresses the methodology and evaluation of teaching, holistic evaluation, and trends in progress during the implementation of the new general education standard in Armenia.

It should be noted that several issues were recorded in the evaluation system, and the research was conducted within this context. In particular, a study was carried out on the effectiveness of applying the evaluation system's methodology, the types and forms of evaluation, and its perception by students, teachers, and parents, as well as on how this progressed. It is important to note that, in the context of the current evaluation methodology, a key problem is the absence or the development of competence-based assignments by teachers.

Teachers and principals with at least one year of work experience in the classes where the State Standard for General Education has been implemented in different regions of Armenia actively participated in the research.

This section presents the results of the research related to systematic evaluation processes. Systematic evaluation helps assess the progress, effectiveness, and long-term impact of all implemented interventions in the school and community.

The research found that the overwhelming majority of teachers have difficulties in applying the new evaluation system, both in terms of technical issues and substance. However, through the formation of a participatory culture and a collaborative atmosphere in educational institutions, as well as mutual cooperation with the relevant departments, by building on the positive and strong aspects of the process, it is possible to increase its effectiveness, thereby raising the quality of education and the effectiveness of implementing the State Standard for General Education.

In the 2025-2026 academic year, the first-time ever exam in the form of an integrated essay on history and literature in the 9th grade is a serious challenge. The experience of Tavush last year and the existing assessment regulations do not ensure uniformity and measurability of competencies. There are also contradictions in the regulations for project-based learning. The assessment system needs further clarification through introduction of measurable tools.

4.1 | Teaching methodology and evaluation

This section of the report is based on research conducted among approximately 50 teachers who have experience and have taught for at least one year with the new State Standard for General Education curricula in various regions of the Republic of Armenia, directly dealing with teaching methodology and evaluation.

Gayane Yeritsyan

Professional Team, “Participatory School” Educational Foundation

| General description

According to the assessment criteria for students in state general education institutions, the purpose of evaluation is to determine the level of a student’s competence development, in accordance with the level of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values acquired that correspond to the final outcomes defined by the curricula and standards of academic subjects.

According to World Bank data, the reform has benefited low-performance students at least at the same rate, or even more, than high-performance students. Before the reform, it was observed that teachers mainly focused on teaching high-performance students, using a “sifting” approach, and often left average-performance students to their own means if they did not manage to keep up (<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099021724065028226/p1675621f017630d61a92617338afa8f88d>):

However, the study showed that the implementation of the new evaluation system created difficulties for a group of teachers (https://kznakgnahatum.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_24.html in Armenian). They find it difficult to perform diagnostic and formative assessments, do not ensure the ideology of the new evaluation system, and often their actions aimed at ensuring quality education are formal in nature.

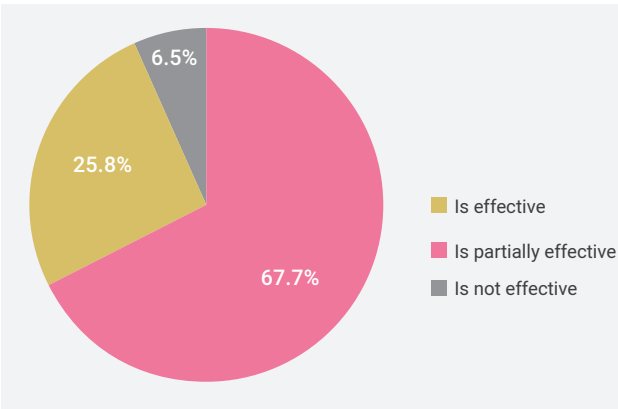
The “Participatory School” Educational Foundation conducted an in-depth study of teaching methodology and evaluation in several general education schools in different regions and carried out research involving various subject teachers and principals.

The main purpose of the research was to identify and highlight the problems and difficulties related to teaching methodology and evaluation, as identified by teachers, and to discuss and develop a series of steps to overcome them.

The studies and research were carried out in different formats, and the results are presented below.

Research Results

According to 67.7% of respondents, the current evaluation system in general education schools is partially effective, while 25.8% believe it is effective.



Positive

Before the summative evaluation, diagnostic and formative evaluations are conducted. The student is motivated each time, knowing they will hear words of encouragement in the next lesson, and by the time of the summative evaluation, they achieve higher scores, marking an effective way to develop a responsible student.

The student learns for the sake of knowledge.

The effectiveness of the current evaluation system will be fully “enjoyed” in a few years.

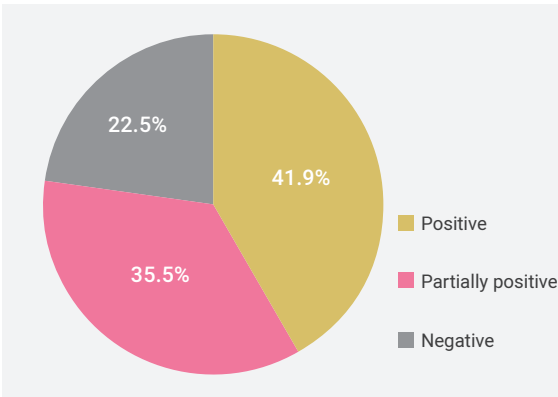
Negative

It does not fully include the mechanisms for measuring the knowledge acquired by the student during their learning process.

The only problem is still adapting to the new form of evaluation, both by the student and the teacher. And when we learn to study not for a grade, but for knowledge, that is when we will have a generation that is conceptually and intellectually developed.

This new evaluation system is not for a class of 35 people; it would be applicable and effective for a class of 7-10 people.

According to 41% of respondents, the fact that no number on the 10-point scale used for graded evaluation under the new State Standard for General Education is considered unsatisfactory is positive. According to 35.5% of respondents, it is partially positive, and according to 22%, it is negative.

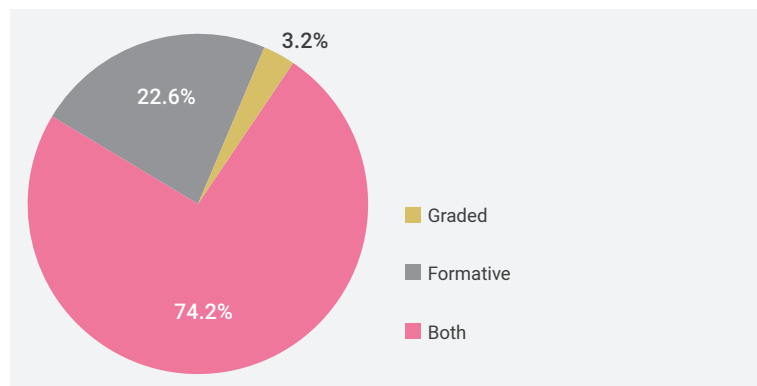


Positive	Negative
If the student understands the importance of learning, then the grade does not matter to them and, in the end, there is no such student as one unsatisfactory knowledge; you just have to work with each child in their own way, and the result will be positive. Of course, this happens once again at the expense of the teacher's workload. Even one point of progress can be encouraged, and each student achieves their educational success in their own way. Therefore, it makes sense that no mark is considered negative. Every student must be evaluated according to their abilities. It helps the student discover their learning potential, and it contributes to the development of their independence.	In any case, there should be a grade that is considered; it serves as a "wake-up call". They think there is no unsatisfactory grade, so they do not strive to learn, even though I always remind my students that we should not study for the sake of a good grade, but for knowledge. Those who wish to learn will always learn. The desire to overcome a certain assessment threshold and the fear of not overcoming it are ingrained in students' consciousness. In this case, students are more relaxed about their own failures, they fail to strive for higher indicators in their studies, and the motivation to learn decreases. It is better not to have grades in the evaluation at all than to have a system without a negative threshold.

According to respondents, this approach of not having a graded evaluation in grades 1-4 and the first half of grade 5 under the new State Standard for General Education has both positive and negative sides.

Positive	Negative
The student focuses on gaining knowledge and not on getting a grade. This has made me very happy, because it is at this age that these undesirable trends begin – driven by parental stress and the obsession with seeing their child as an overachiever. As a result, children start cheating and copying to get high grades. Grades, which is often not in line with students' knowledge, will not be the only source of their motivation. The transition of students from the primary to the middle level is smoother.	At first, it will be a little difficult for all parties, especially for teachers who have to write an individual report for each child, but I am sure that after 1-2 years the results will speak for themselves. Parents will still expect and demand some kind of quantitative indicator for their child's knowledge. The problem is mainly with good students; they always want to see a good grade. Compared to other countries, our challenges are different; we are in a struggle for existence. We need them to value learning and have ambition, they should not accept mediocrity.

It is pleasing to see that today, the majority of teachers, 74.2%, implement both graded and formative evaluations in their teaching process, use different evaluation rubrics, and emphasize self-assessment and peer-assessment.



According to the respondents, the following qualitative changes were observed in the classrooms at the end of the academic year with the introduction of the new education standard:

- Students are no longer as dependent on grades as they used to be and this topic causes less stress.
- In standard-based classes, one can see more critical-analytical thinking, collaboration, and the ability to work in groups, which are great qualitative advantages.
- Students have become more flexible and proactive.
- Thanks to project-based work, significant changes have occurred in students' value systems.
- Students are able to self-reflect in an interesting manner and do not focus on their grades. They know how to express themselves and what to prioritize.

Policy recommendations

Following steps can be taken to improve the evaluation system:

1. Organize frequent external evaluations in schools, monitor continuously, and identify issues.
2. The evaluation of projects should not be graded, but rather ranked, for example, first, second, or third rank, because we want to encourage them to work, research, and create.
3. Parents should also be taught the evaluation procedure.
4. Provide classrooms with the appropriate technology to make it possible to use online evaluation tools and not spend time on paperwork.

5. Lower the workload for classrooms by arranging fewer students, not 30 per class. Otherwise, this change will only take place in name. We will end up simply delivering the necessary documentation at the expense of the teacher's mental and physical health, because we have no other option. With large classes, there cannot be any in-depth application of the system, because a teacher's day consists of 24 hours like everyone else, not 72 hours.
6. Remove evaluation using grades at all levels, and switch to a credit system from middle school onward.
7. I would introduce a modular system, where starting from the 6th grade, students would choose the modules in which they are interested. In other words, they would study the subjects that interest them, based on what their abilities allow. It would not torment students and teachers to ensure clearly accepted final outcomes, the final outcomes that a student may simply not be physically able to achieve.
8. Provide the school with the necessary resources to record effective educational outcomes, and consider the provision of teachers for the corresponding subject in regional and border regions.
9. Not everything should be left to the teacher's creativity or imagination, and their ability to find a way out of every situation and overcome problems with honor. Support teachers in all matters.

4.2 | Holistic evaluation

This section of the report is based on the experience of the Teach for Armenia Foundation in the field of data and impact assessment.

Esmarida Poghosyan

Teach for Armenia Educational Foundation

| General description

As part of its two-year leadership program for teachers, Teach for Armenia strives to develop the professional and leadership competences of teachers. This will also make it possible to target the development of students' leadership competences and promote their learning, thereby achieving educational justice and contributing to community development.

As a continuously developing organization, Teach for Armenia emphasizes the development and application of systematic processes and mechanisms for assessing the impact and quality of work carried out within the two-year program.

Systematic evaluation processes help assess the progress, effectiveness, and long-term impact of all implemented interventions in the school and community. This system allows for data-based and evidence-based decision-making for the continuous development and improvement of the program. It also ensures the organization's accountability and transparency for all stakeholders, i.e. teachers, students, the school community, state bodies, sponsoring organizations and individuals, experts in the field of education, and others.

Co-creation and participation are part of the work culture adopted by the organization, and the evaluation processes are not separate from this culture. Teacher-leaders and students are part of the process of creating, introducing, and implementing the evaluation system. Collaborative approaches reinforce teachers' and students' understanding of the purpose of data and evaluation, i.e. why are these evaluations carried out, and how can the results be used?

Years of work and experience in carrying out evaluations suggest that, without a profound understanding by students and teachers of the purpose of applying evaluation tools, it is almost impossible to get their commitment to organizing these processes. And without the commitment of teachers and students, the quality and purposefulness of the conducted evaluations could end up being unsatisfactory.

| Holistic evaluation processes

During the two-year teacher leadership program, the impact of teacher-leaders on students' holistic outcomes has been observed. When conducting a holistic evaluation, learning is viewed not only from the perspective of academic progress but also from the perspective of the skills and leadership competences students are developing, and how they apply these new skills in their learning and daily life.

Diagnostic evaluations conducted at the beginning of the academic year identify and show the foundational knowledge that students have and the level of the class. Two types of diagnostic evaluations are carried out with students – academic and leadership skills evaluations.

Academic evaluations are conducted for all subject groups. The tests are based on Bloom's Taxonomy, which considers the levels of knowledge, application, and critical thinking. The teacher-leader includes the results of the diagnostic evaluation in their lesson plans and when setting learning objectives.

Through the evaluation of **students' leadership skills**, we seek to determine the leadership and socio-emotional skills that students possess. Students self-assess their competences through questionnaires that were developed based on Teach for Armenia's Leadership Concept and were sociometrically validated by specialists from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

Based on the diagnostic evaluation approaches, **summative evaluations** are also conducted at the end of the academic year. Through summative evaluations, we understand the progress that students have made throughout the year, and we identify areas that require special attention and improvement. In particular, during the 2023-2024 academic year, 1,548 students from grades 2-12 participated in academic evaluations. The evaluations demonstrated that there had been an overall academic growth of 16% among students in their levels of knowledge, application, and critical thinking, which corresponds to the threshold set by the organization.

Naturally, one of the important components of holistic **evaluation is the assessment of classroom culture**. Teach for Armenia works with the Teach For All international network and the Panorama Foundation in conducting a **Student Perception Survey**. Through this survey, students respond, based on their own perceptions, to questions on classroom culture, classroom engagement, learning acquisition, and relationships with the teacher. The survey is anonymous and is conducted by an external organization, which lends greater credibility to its results. For example, during the 2023-2024 academic year, 1,758 students from grades 3-12 participated in the Student Perception Survey, and 89% of the students had a positive response when it came to their classroom culture. For comparison, the average score for other partner organizations of the Teach For All international network that participated in the survey was 72%, which shows that Teach for Armenia had a significantly higher result.

In parallel with teaching their subjects, teacher-leaders implement change-based learning, which is Teach for Armenia's original approach to project-based learning aimed at developing students' leadership and innovative thinking. In the context of holistic evaluation, one can see how teacher-leaders implement change-based learning programs in their communities. At the conclusion of the student-led innovative programs, a survey is conducted among the students. Based on the latest data, during the 2023-2024 academic year, 775 students were directly involved in the student-led innovative programs. As a result of the surveys conducted with them, 94% of the students noted that, thanks to the program, they understood that their communities are full of new opportunities, and that the program helped them grow as leaders.

| Summary

One of the most important phases of holistic evaluation is the summary and reflection on the results/data. The development and implementation of evaluation tools can be completely pointless if there are no discussions, collations, and comparisons around the collected results. Evaluation processes should never aim to point specifically at the work of any school community, teacher, or student. On the contrary, the goal is to help the teacher grow and mature professionally, which directly promotes the development of students' academic skills, leadership, and innovative thinking.

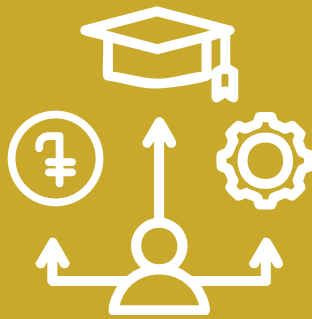
| Policy recommendations

Based on years of experience in organizing holistic evaluations, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Have the necessary confidence that the developed tools align with the evaluation goals, i.e. they measure what they are intended to measure.
2. Include both the teacher and the student in the holistic evaluation process, clearly explaining why and how each evaluation is being conducted.
3. Conduct diagnostic evaluations before the start of the learning process, using the results to guide the implementation of the curriculum.
4. After obtaining the final results, be sure to discuss them with teachers and students. Understand how they perceive the results and what areas for improvement they see.
5. Compare and contrast the results from different academic years to understand what outcomes various interventions in the learning process produce.

6. Conduct evaluations with the goal of developing the professional and leadership skills of teachers.
7. In the context of the transition to the new standard for the 9th-grade graduating class in the 2025-26 academic year, it is especially important to strengthen the concept and practical application of educational outcome evaluation. This is because competence-based final examinations will be introduced for the first time that year. The uncertainty surrounding their implementation could create serious risks for the introduction of the new education standard and for the conditions for motivation.

5



Educational Policy, Governance, and Funding

The physical conditions of the schools were significantly improved in 2024-25 as a result of massive construction and renovation work in the framework of the Government program “300 schools and 500 kindergartens” (with constructions and renovations finished in about 60 schools, with about 250 schools in progress and another 60 in preparation).

While the National Assembly has increased the education allocations in absolute terms (from 142 billion AMD in 2019 to 250 billion AMD in 2023), the government has not fully utilized these funds (only 219 billion drams were used in 2023). Despite the increase in absolute funding, education's share as a percentage of GDP and as a percentage of state budget expenditures is decreasing. According to 2026-2028 mid-term expenditure program, the government plans to reduce allocations to education.

5.1 | Strategic planning and funding of the general education policy

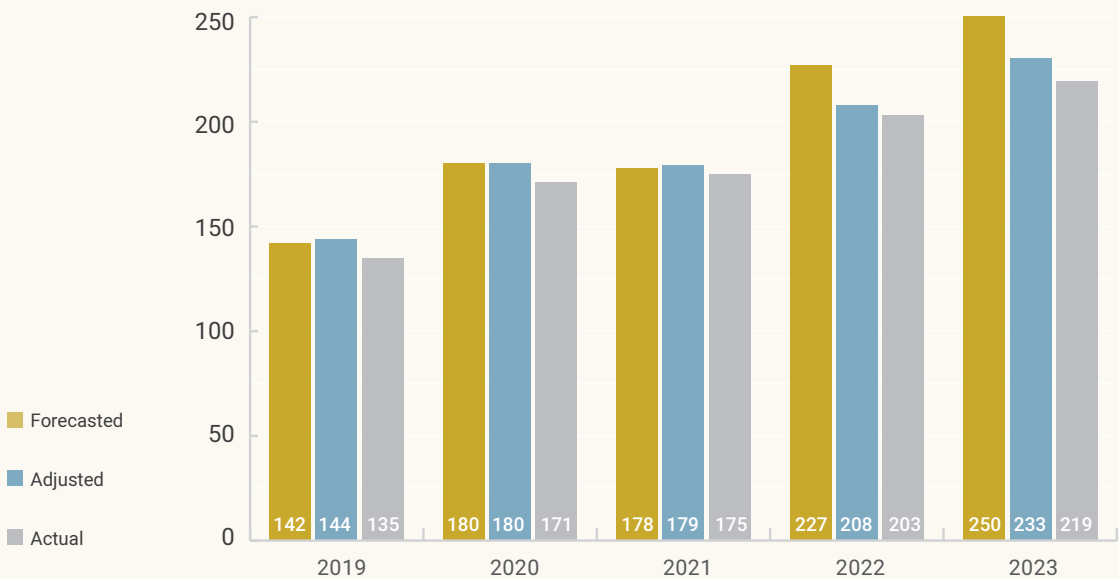
This section of the report is based on a corresponding study conducted in the summer of 2024 for the Educational Congress 2024.

Artak Kyurumyan
Public Finance Management Specialist

| Situational analysis

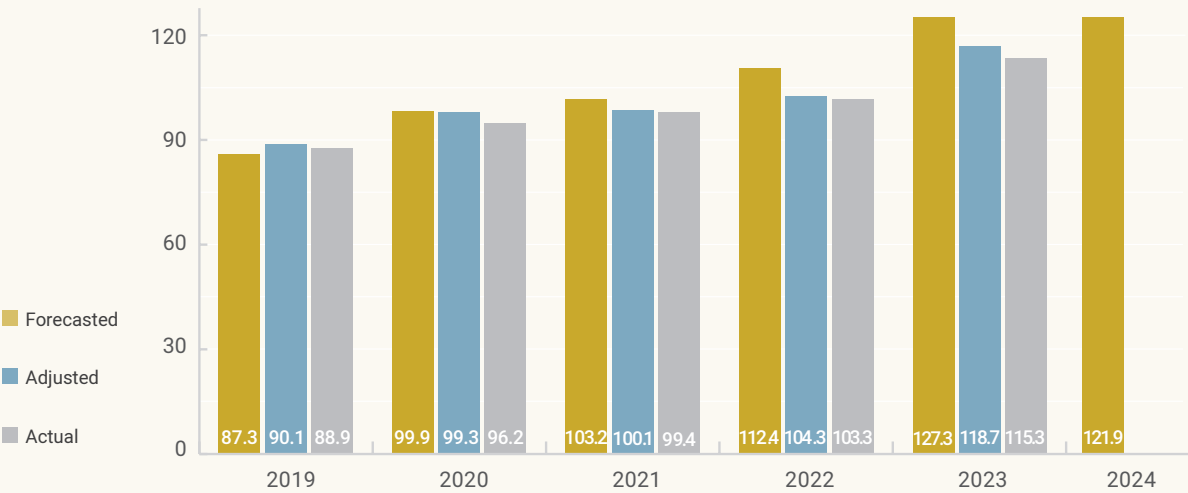
Over the last 15 years, the funding amounts for the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports have grown in absolute terms. The funding amount of 135 billion AMD in 2019 reached 219 billion AMD in 2023. However, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports does not utilize the entire amount of funding allocated to it by the state budget. For example, in 2023, the National Assembly allocated 250 billion AMD to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports from the state budget, but the Ministry actually used only 219 billion AMD.

MESCS Funding, 2019-2023



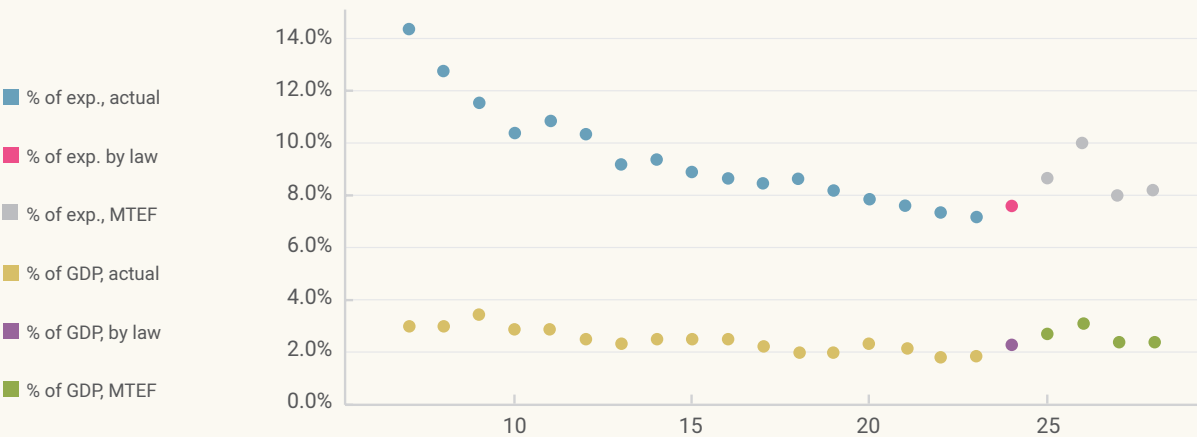
The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports does not use all the financial resources allocated by the state budget for its programs in general education either. The non-utilization of a large amount of funds means that several programs and activities are not being fully implemented. For example, in 2023, the National Assembly allocated 127.3 billion AMD from the state budget for general education funding, but the bodies responsible for the program used only 115.3 billion AMD. Given the dire situation in general education, the non-utilization of 12 billion AMD allocated by the National Assembly means that the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports does not seem to have the necessary capacity to implement large-scale programs.

General Education (1146 billion AMD)



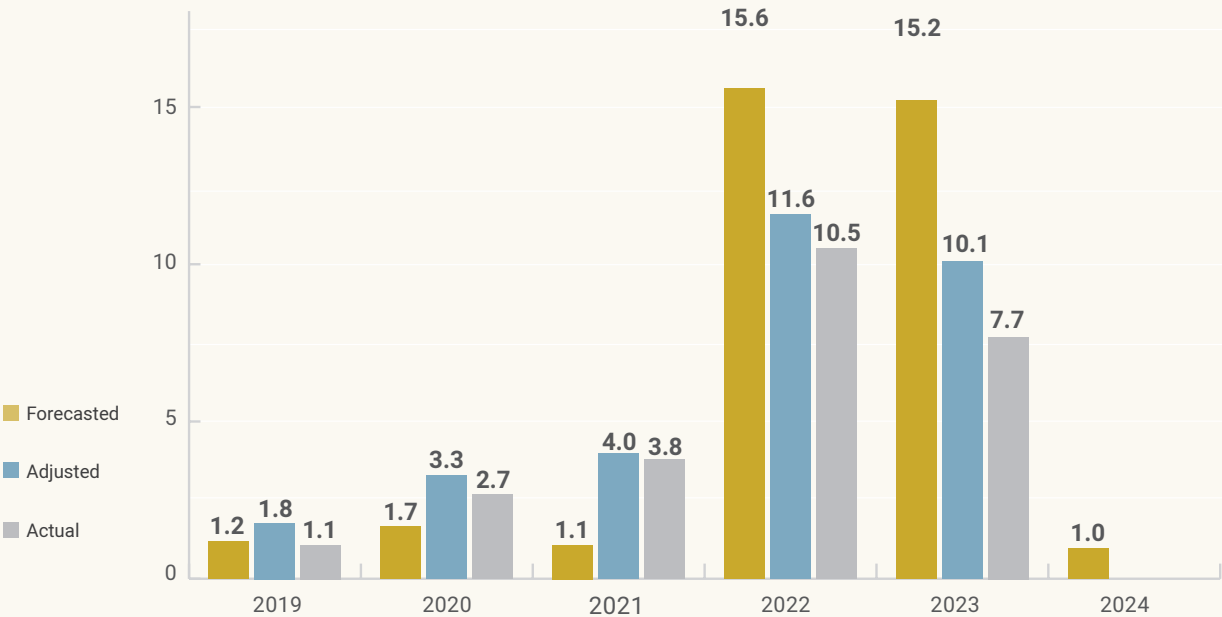
Although funding amounts are increasing in absolute terms, the share of education funding as a percentage of state budget expenditures and as a percentage of GDP is decreasing.

Education Funding 2007-2023 and programs 2024-2027
(percentage of total expenditure, percentage of GDP)

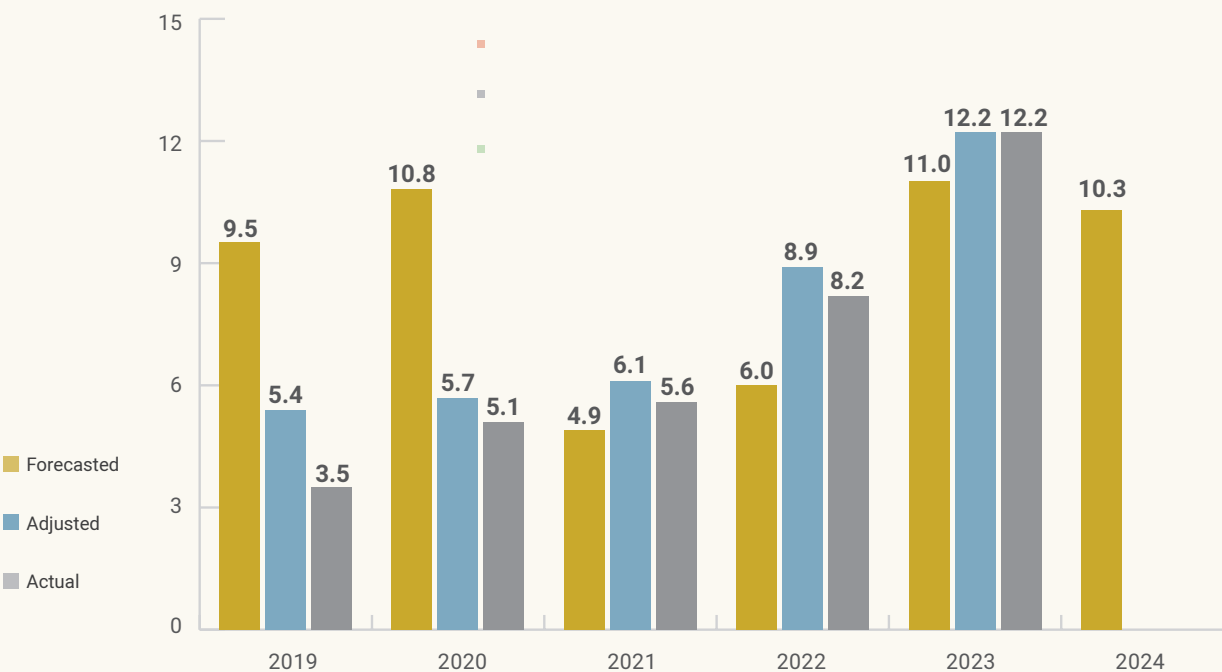


The financial indicators (forecasted and actual) for the remaining programs related to general education are not satisfactory either.

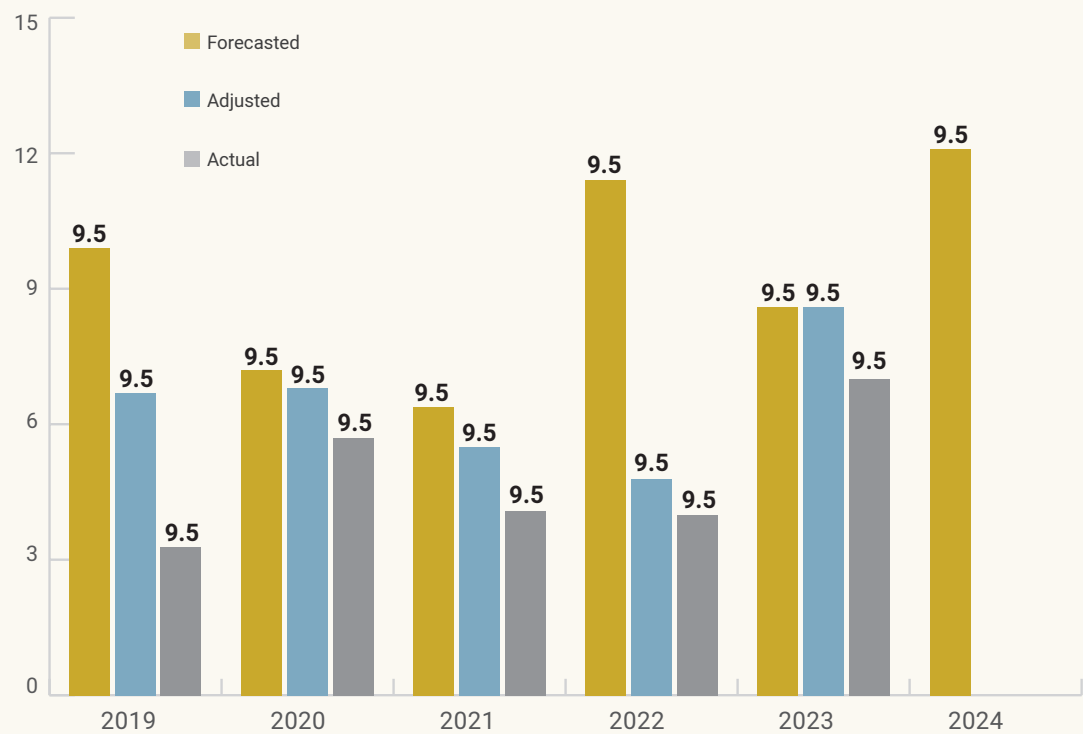
Safe School (1183 billion AMD)



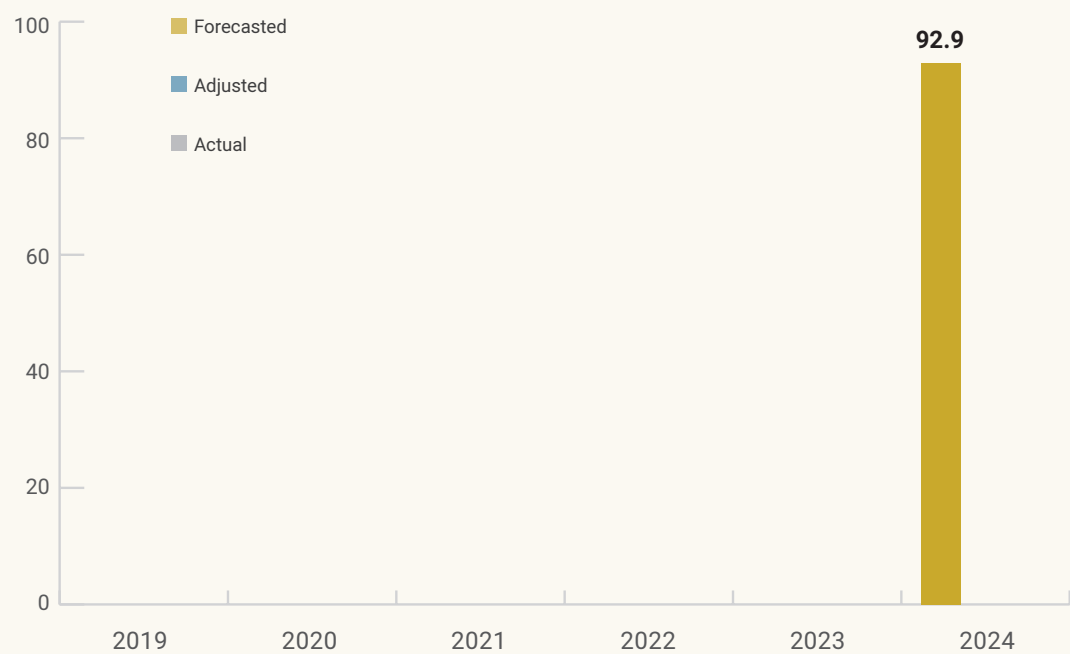
Improving Seismic Safety in Schools (1183 billion AMD)



Education Quality Assurance (1192 billion AMD)

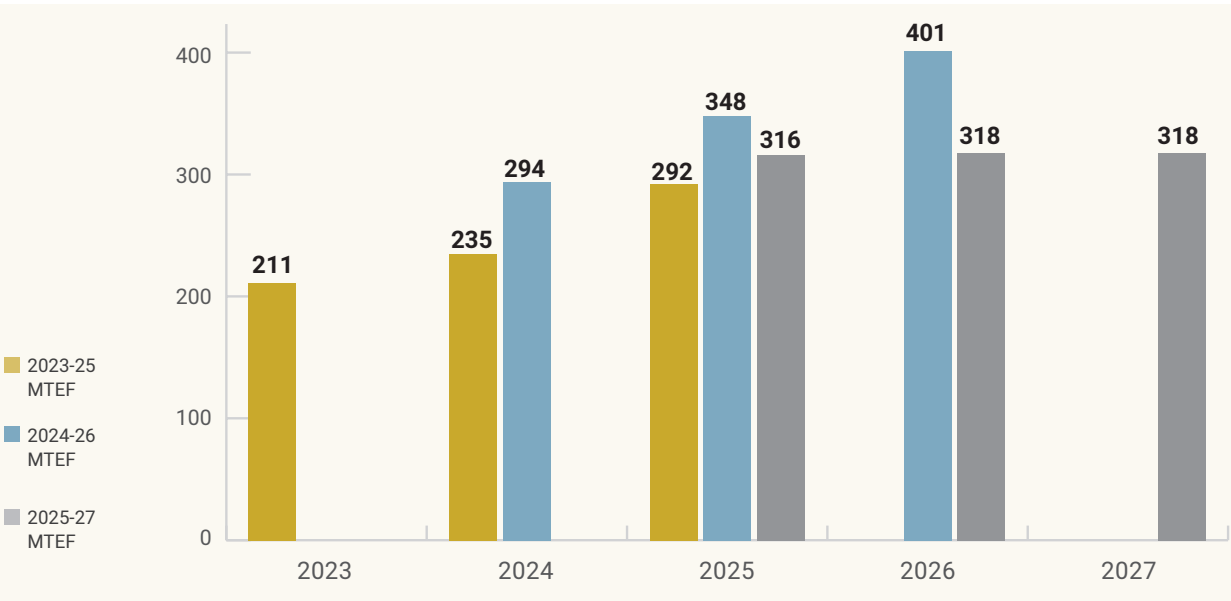


Establishment, construction, improvement of general education schools and preschools (1236 billion AMD)



From 2025 to 2027, through the Medium-term Expenditure Framework (METF), the RA Government plans to reduce funding for education in MTEF 2024-2026.

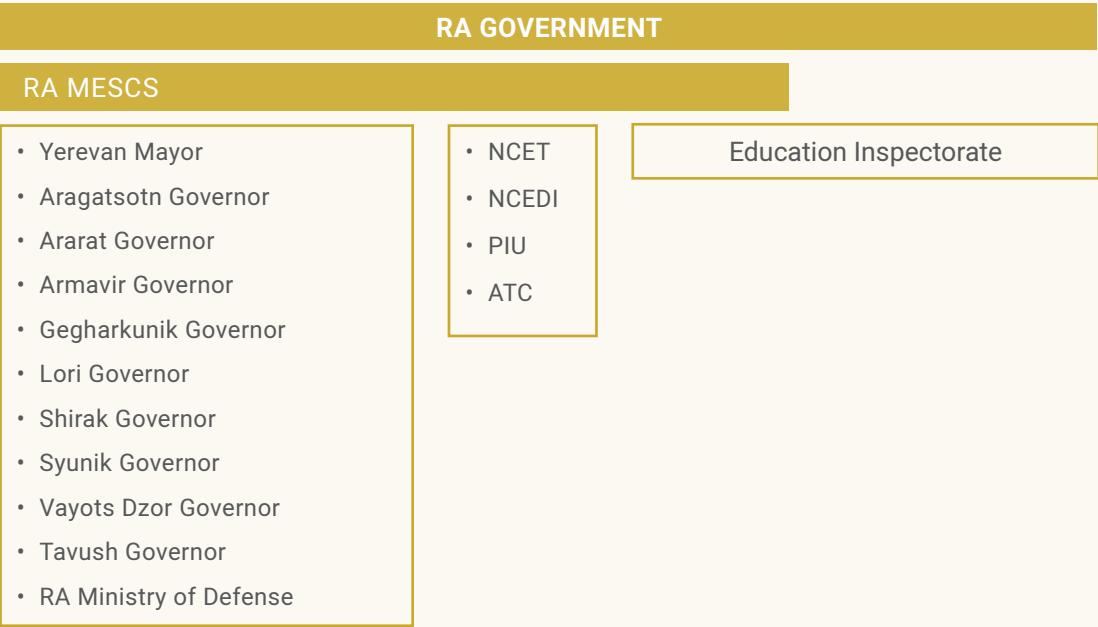
MTEF Comparison (billion AMD)



| Administrative issues in the sphere of general education

The governance system of education and schools is extremely complex and fragmented.

General Education Governance System



The RA MESCS, the RA Ministry of Defense, the ten Regional Governors’ offices, and the Yerevan Municipality are involved in management of general education.

There is no specific body responsible for the execution of the state budget’s General Education program.

The school governance system is also extremely complicated.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM	
Principal	Administrative-economic coordinator
Depending on the body under whose jurisdiction the school lies, competitions to fill vacant positions are announced by the Yerevan City Hall, the Governor’s office, or the MESCS. The competition is run by the MESCS. Depending on the jurisdiction, the order is signed by Yerevan City Hall, the Governor’s office, or the Minister of ESCS. The Council provides the conclusion on the progress of development programs. Based on this conclusion, Yerevan City Hall, the Governor’s office, or the MESCS is authorized to remove them from their position.	Depending on the body under whose jurisdiction the school lies, competitions to fill vacant positions are announced by the Yerevan City Hall, the Governor’s office, or the MESCS. Depending on the body under whose jurisdiction the school lies, competitions to fill vacant positions are run by the Yerevan City Hall, the Governor’s office, or the MESCS. Depending on the jurisdiction, the order is signed by Yerevan City Hall, the Governor’s office, or the Minister of ESCS. Yerevan City Hall, the Governor’s office, or the MESCS is authorized to remove them from their position.

School councils are formal structures that do not really do anything. In the state program for education development until 2030, the Government noted that “the introduction of governance councils in educational institutions was a crucial step, but it did not have a groundbreaking significance as it formal in nature, and decisions are made by one person or are influenced.”

The public was not informed about the identity of the sole decision maker. What prevents that person from making decisions alone now?

The public was not informed of who was influencing the councils’ decision-making. What prevents those people from influencing the councils’ decisions now? What new mechanisms have been introduced to prevent the influencing of council decisions?

In some cases, the councils are chaired by school employees, meaning the principal's subordinates, which reduces the likelihood of the latter asking difficult questions to the principal and objectively scrutinizing and evaluating the school development plan during council meetings (unless, of course, there is influence from external forces).

The councils are still formal in nature, do not make important decisions independently, and the making of important decisions continues to be influenced and centralized.

| Selecting principals

Applicants for the position of principal must present a development program.

Where do the candidates acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities to manage education and develop a school development program? Where are education managers trained in Armenia?

Any program must have a financial rationale. In this case, the requirement for a financial rationale is absent. How can a candidate provide a financial rationale if they are not responsible for financial management? What kind of program is being suggested if, in the case of a large number of schools, approximately 90% of the funding allocated to the school goes to paying salaries?

Almost two years after the approval of the state program for education development until 2030, tenders for filling vacant positions of principals has revealed that “we have a serious problem with developing capacity in the field” (Zhanna Andreasyan, Minister of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports). What is the reason for this weak capacity? The development, public discussion, approval, and implementation of the state program for education development until 2030 has been formal in nature.

The “Participatory School” Foundation asked the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports to provide information on schools where the principal's position remains vacant, the date the position became vacant, and other data. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports has not provided this information.

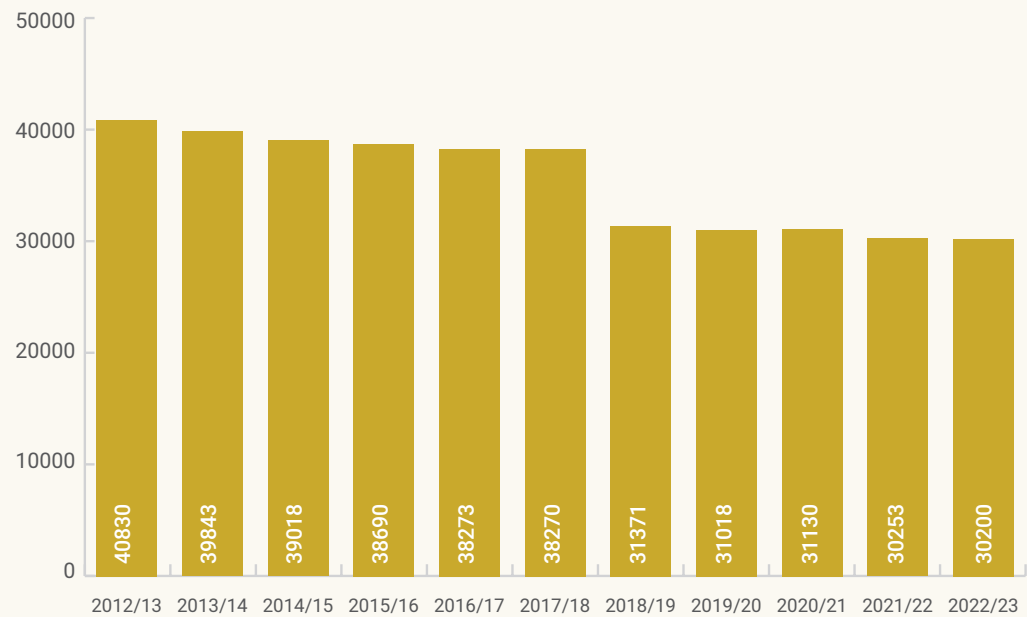
The “Participatory School” Foundation collected this information from alternative sources, which resulted in an approximate estimate. As of the beginning of September 2024, in 161 schools in 8 regions, the position of principal has been vacant for a total of approximately 57,700 days, or about 158 years.

This is unacceptable and testifies that the mechanism for selecting principals has significant shortcomings.

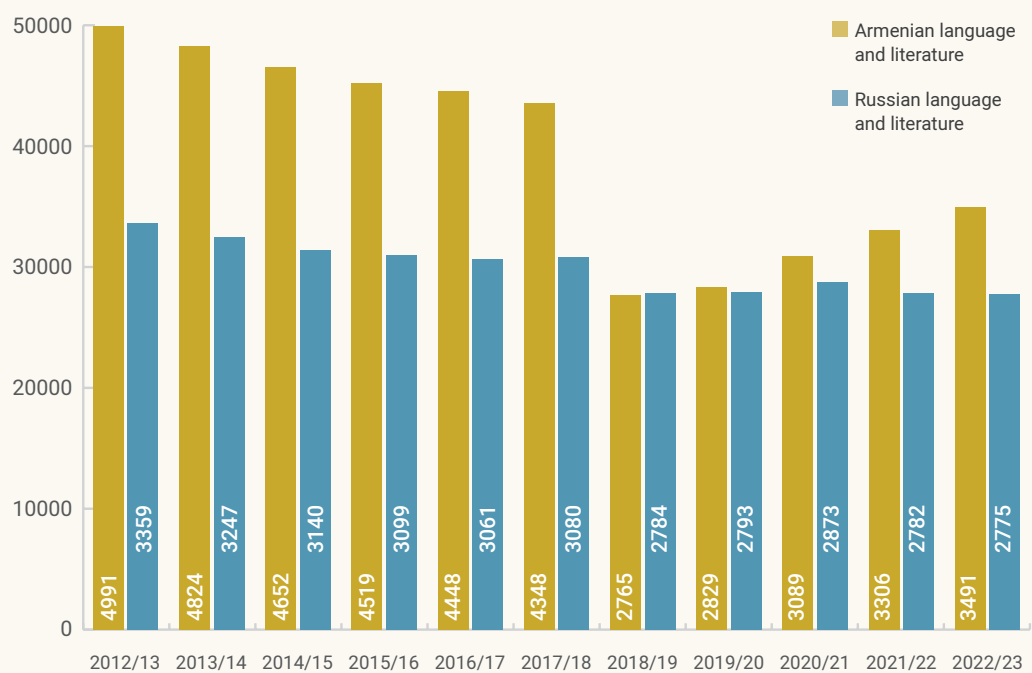
The number of teachers in school

There is a very serious problem with the number of teachers in Armenian schools.

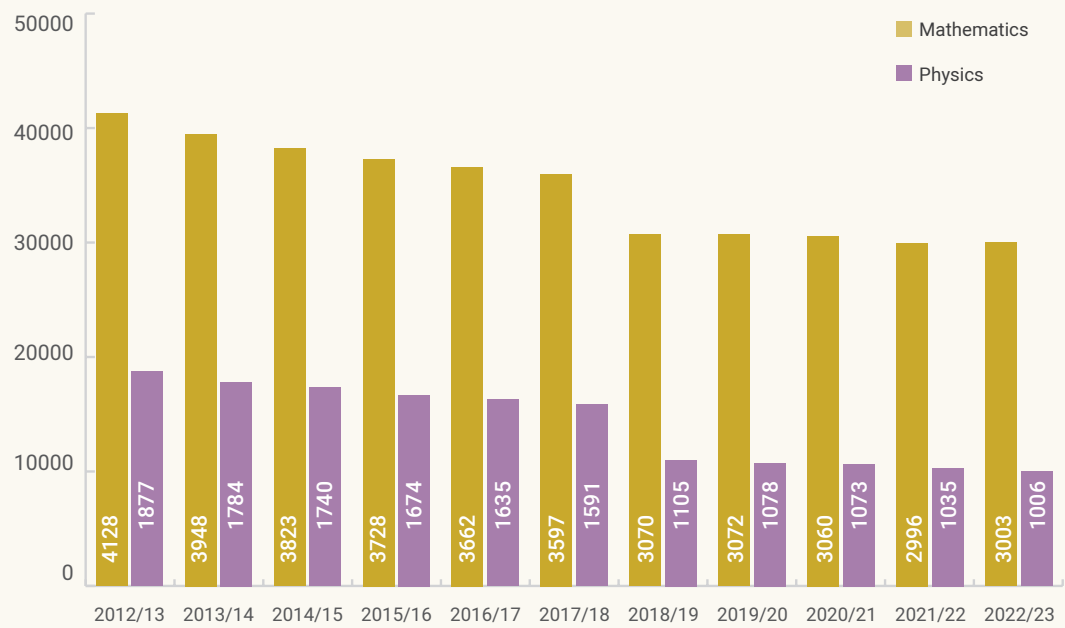
Total Number of Teachers



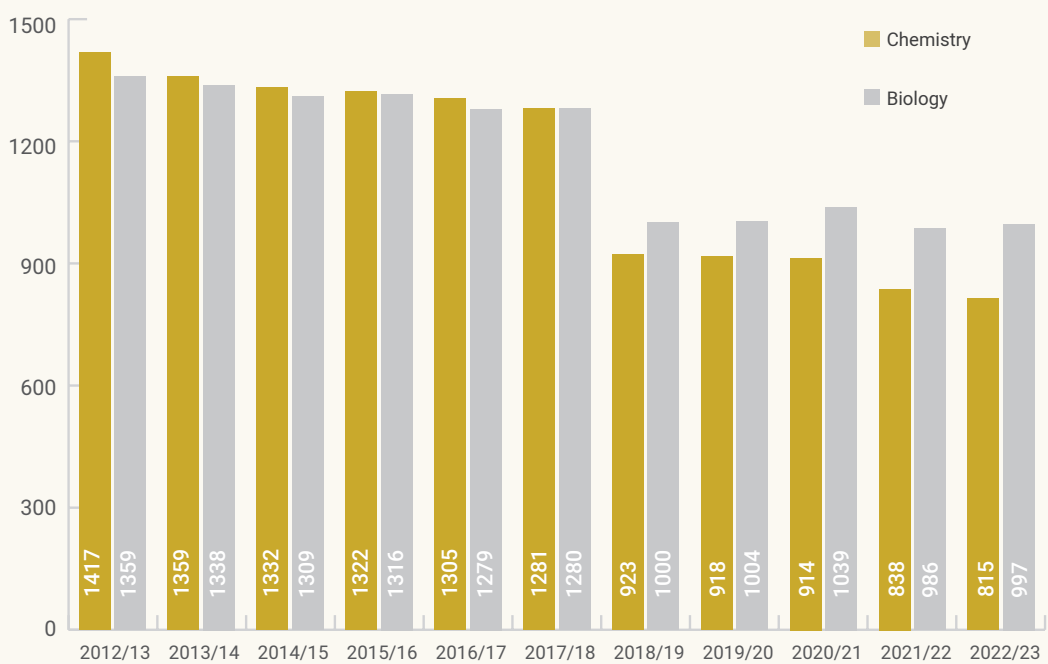
Number of Teachers of Armenian and Russian Language and Literature



Number of Teachers of Mathematics and Physics



Number of Teachers of Chemistry and Biology



It is evident that there is a problem with the availability of teachers for certain subjects in a number of schools, especially in the regions.

In April 2021, the Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports was suggesting that specialists should apply to fill the 141 vacant teacher positions in the regions through the website <https://kadrer.emis.am/>. As of the beginning of September 2024, there is already an announcement about 708 vacant positions on the same website. These additional 550+ vacant positions were not created as a result of new job creation, but because specialists are leaving the school system.

The RA Government has not provided explanations as to why it has been unable to attract qualified specialists over the past six years. Is the problem solely related to salaries, or are there other issues as well? No analysis has been presented.

Experts are proposing various solutions, some of which are one-step solutions. For example, Ashot Bleyan suggests not building any new schools, but rather raising teachers' salaries with the funds designated for school construction. This approach assumes that approximately 30,000 highly qualified specialists work in Armenian schools and that they do not provide good education due to low salaries. In other words, they could provide it, but they do not do so, because the salary is low.

| Compulsory Education

Although the government launched a subsystem for identifying children out of compulsory education in 2024, according to the data from the Audit Chamber, out of 19,605 children who were out of education, only 695 were identified. The gross enrollment ratio of students in schools for 2024/25 was 90,4 % with a certain positive tendency in relation to the previous years, while the enrollment in high school was about 82 %. The reason for this number is probably about the engagement of teenagers in labour, as a result of what about 17 % of teenagers are dropping out of the education system at the important stage for choosing a profession.

According to some data, in a number of cases, parents remove children studying in high school from school so that the latter work and financially assist the family.

| Summary and policy recommendations

There is no single step that will help solve the problems that have accumulated in the field of general education in Armenia. A systematic, multifaceted approach is required.

1. First, we must note that we do not have a complete understanding of the state of general education in Armenia, because a quality analysis of the situation was not carried out during the development of the state program for education development until 2030. A new development program is needed that is based on facts and developed following a broad public discussion. The discovery that “we have a serious problem with developing capacity in the field” should not have come two years after the education development program became law. This should have already been clear when the law was being approved, its causes should have been analyzed, goals for 2030 should have been set, and the RA Government/MESCS should have presented programs on how they intend to tackle this issue.
2. Because a formal approach was applied during the development, public discussion, and approval of the development program, we are discovering problems as we go. This means that in several cases, public resources have already been wasted (public resources were not used for their intended purpose because the problems had not been identified, there was no defined goal, the defined goal was not based on analysis, and the path from the current situation to the goal was not outlined).
3. Compared to the previous Mid-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), in the 2025-27 MTEF, the RA Government plans to reduce the absolute and relative amounts of allocations to education (as a percentage of budget expenditures and GDP). The Government must increase the funding for general education, as well as the share of general education funding in the state budget.
4. From 2019-23, the RA Government has been unable to achieve the goals set for the general education program (it has not achieved the final outcome indicators). The RA Government must present a report on the performance of the final outcome indicators that it has set.
5. Several schools have seen the principal's position remain vacant for a long time (with duties performed by acting principals). It is unclear where, when, and how applicants for the vacant position of school principal were supposed to acquire the skills to write a development program and apply it. It is necessary, to create a state-guaranteed course, with the help of international expert support, in one of Armenia's universities corresponding to the principles of democratic school management. This course would provide future principal candidates with the necessary foundation of knowledge, skills, and values. It is also unclear how they are supposed to implement the actions presented in the development program if, in the case of most schools, approximately 90% of the funding is directed to salaries. There are uncertainties related to the scope of rights and responsibilities of the principal and the administrative-economic coordinator.

6. In 2019, representatives of civil society and active educational stakeholders were included in school councils at the suggestion of authorized bodies, which had a positive impact on the school's participatory environment. During the consolidation of the councils, civil society was largely pushed out of school councils, and state or community workers were appointed instead. It is necessary to encourage active civic participation in school councils to promote the principles of democratic governance. The management councils continue to be of a formal nature, and the making of important decisions continues to be guided by state bodies.
7. The MESCS must record and present to the public all cases where the council has given a negative conclusion regarding the annual report on the implementation of the school development program. If the councils do not give a negative conclusion, it means the principals are working well. If the principals are working well, the MESCS must explain why the state of general education is not showing a corresponding improvement.:
8. The governance system of education and schools must be simplified.
9. There is not a sufficient number of teachers for a number of subjects. There is no information on how the mandatory or voluntary certification of teachers has affected the quality of education. In a number of cases, principals have preferred to become administrative-economic coordinators. It is necessary to understand what needs to be done to make the positions of teacher and school principal more attractive.
10. There is a need to interlink and synchronize the data about high school students to avoid hidden escape from compulsory education and analyze the causes of it.

5.2 | Corruption risks in the general education system

This section of the report is based on an online survey conducted by Transparency International's Anticorruption Center from August 29 to September 5, 2024, covering 331 teachers for the Educational Congress 2024.

Anahit Hovakimyan

Transparency International Anticorruption Center

| General observations

To evaluate the prevalence of corruption in the general education system, Transparency International's Anticorruption Center conducted an online survey among 331 teachers. 21% of the survey participants lived in Yerevan, while 79% lived in the regions. The survey results show certain trends and processes that point to the presence of corruption risks or manifestations in the field of education. These are:

1. Manifestations of nepotism in the hiring and promotion processes.
2. Unequal treatment and nepotism on the part of the school administration.
3. Unequal treatment of students.
4. A low level of participation in the textbook selection process.
5. Unnecessary interference in student evaluation.

Data

The survey documented several important facts and issues, including:

● Corruption in the processes of hiring and promoting teachers

22% of respondents indicated that over the past 5 years, money, gifts, or additional services were demanded from them or from teachers they know in exchange of getting hired or promoted in school. They also reported the creation of artificial obstacles or

nepotism in favor of a particular candidate. In these responses, cases of nepotism are most common, where individuals connected to the school principal receive advantages in the processes of hiring and promotion.

● **Unequal treatment from administrative staff**

33% of survey participants noticed manifestations of unequal treatment from the school's administrative staff. Specifically, according to teachers

- In the process of allocating class hours, priority is given to teachers close to the school administration, not to experienced teachers.
- The class schedule of teachers close to the school administration is created in a way that is convenient for them, causing inconvenience to other teachers.
- Clubs are allocated to teachers who have warm relationships with the school principal, not according to need.
- Individuals who have the right to conduct class observations use them as a form of punishment.

● **Unequal treatment of students**

24% of survey participants noticed manifestations of unequal treatment toward students by their colleagues (e.g., higher/lower grades, other privileges), linked to additional paid classes being offered. Teachers more often manifest unequal treatment by demanding that students attend additional paid classes rather than by asking for a gift, money, or other service from a parent.

● **Low level of participation in the textbook selection process**

- 34% of teachers who participated in the survey do not participate in the textbook selection process.
- 56% of teachers who participate in the textbook selection process do not receive feedback on their proposals/opinions regarding textbooks.

● **Unnecessary interference in student evaluation**

Teachers receive requests to change students' grades – 39% from parents and 31% from colleagues.

At the same time, it is encouraging that the majority of teachers note that

1. Cases where their colleagues ask for money, gifts, or services from parents for a high grade, a positive attitude, or other privileges are rare.
2. Manifestations of corruption are almost never encountered in the evaluations conducted at the end of training.
3. Cases of money collection among teachers are rare.
4. The majority of teachers are free from political pressures and coercion.
5. Teachers are familiar with the Rules of Integrity for Pedagogical Staff (Code of Conduct) adopted by the MESCS. In fact, 43% of survey participants noted that they follow these rules.

| Policy recommendations

In order to overcome the documented problems and promote positive trends, it is proposed to

1. Improve the procedures for teacher hiring and promotion, and ensure oversight of these.
2. Conduct courses and discussions on the rules of teacher conduct and their application in the work process, as well as on the damages caused by non-compliant behavior.
3. Encourage the practice of reporting and speaking out about manifestations of corruption and non-compliance in schools, investigate the received reports, and take appropriate measures of accountability.

Executive Summary

The introduction of the new competence-based General Education Standard is the main achievement for the education system of Armenia, though bearing challenges on its way. Adopting and implementing some progressive regulations such as flexible curriculum with optional school or individual components, project-based learning as well as teaching innovations, the system still lacks efficient management and communication at different levels, quality training in formation and assessment of competences and faces several resistances, and communication failures hinder the successful address to these resistances. The physical conditions of the schools were significantly improved in 2024-25 as a result of massive construction and renovation work in the framework of the Government program “300 schools and 500 kindergartens” (with constructions and renovations finished in about 60 schools, with about 250 schools in progress and another 60 in preparation). Although some milestone indicators reach sufficient results, core areas such as content, methodology, and democratic environment show modest performance

1 | Competence-based Education: New General Education Standard Introduction

The New General Education Standard brings a bold positive change with the perspective of teaching knowledge, skills and values together. As a result some schools and educational platforms already use free spaces to create new methodological tools and content. Recommendations include engaging international experts to develop assessment tools, providing comprehensive training for respective state institutions, creating a measurable system for formation and assessment of competences through exam tasks, developing a roadmap for eight key competences, linking competences to educational levels' outcomes and creating accessible resources for teachers.

Teachers Trainings and Certification

Reforms resulted in liberalization of training through outsource mechanisms. A significant problem of mandatory certification of teachers is the lack of follow up and support for teachers in applying newly acquired knowledge and skills. The 2024 changes to the certification process, based on professional needs assessment, are problematic also due to unclear questionnaire formulations and a lack of clear measurement tools for assessing knowledge after training. While voluntary certification of teachers has become a good tool for professional development and increasing salaries (about 9000 from 31700 teachers were certified since 2021, another 8900 applied for 2025 certification), it is necessary to add methodological, value-based and skills-based components to the assessment and create better follow up and re-engagement mechanisms by principals. Recommendations include ensuring a professional and fair system for checking training outcomes, enabling schools to fund targeted teacher training throughout the year, involving stakeholders in legislative initiatives, and providing measurable tools for continuous support to certified teachers.

Legislative Challenges for the New Standard

The Ministry of ESCS is perpetually addressing and improving the legal regulations as a feedback to issues that occur in daily practice. Still there is a need to clarify the daily and weekly maximum student workload, as current regulations do not align with the new standard's allocated percentages for subject areas. There is also no established credit system for students. There is also a need for revision of mandatory state subjects in the third stage of secondary education and further clarification on integrated subjects. The changes in connection with the reform are not clear especially in organizing the education for ethnic minorities.

Creation of New Textbooks

In a gradual transition since 2023 more than 200 new textbooks were created. Textbook development has been liberalized with new creative groups successfully participating in it. However this process was accompanied with deficiencies in tender procedures, contradictions, technical and legal issues, leading to delays in textbook printing and distribution. Although several innovative textbooks were created, some textbooks are refined versions of old textbooks or don't use competence-based approaches. A key issue is the structure of integrated subject programs and textbooks, particularly in the STEM subjects, where actual integration of core ideas is lacking. Social science textbooks are criticized for a disconnect between complex topics and students' linguistic abilities. Certain individuals or institutions with prior monopolies still hold significant advantages in textbook creation and distribution. Expertise is sometimes influenced by powerful professional networks or accompanied by conflict of interest. The selection process is often influenced by school directors or others due to technical and time limitations, which hinder teachers to make reviews and informed choices.

2 | Pluralistic, Participatory Culture and Governance

Despite legal frameworks promoting participatory governance, school councils often function formally, with decision-making processes lacking genuine horizontal and egalitarian principles. A key reason for this is the lack of participatory skills among pedagogical staff and a deficiency in meeting management skills. The culture of pluralism and participation is largely absent in most schools surveyed, while this is crucial in coordinating the formation of key competences defined by the new standard.

Participatory Governance and the Role of Councils in Schools

There is a certain regression in participatory culture and accountability in schools. While since 2019, active representatives of civil society were included in school councils, after consolidation of the councils, civil society was largely pushed out of school councils, and state or community workers were appointed instead. Separating administrative and educational management of schools challenged the autocratic leadership tendencies, although this process itself faces human resource issues. Decision-making is largely non-participatory. Decisions are often made by the school administration, and parents largely lack awareness of their statutory rights. Student councils lack real autonomy. Meetings are convened and led by school administration, and students rarely initiate projects or participate in community development programs. Overall, the findings indicate that participatory governance is largely superficial, with actual decision-making power concentrated with the school director, despite legal provisions for democratic processes.

Bullying and Violence in the Schools

Limited studies indicate that schools are the most common place for bullying. The presence of bullying in schools is attributed not only to diverse family backgrounds but also to incorrect approaches by educators. Some government agencies and NGOs are actively working to combat bullying, hate speech, intolerance, and discrimination, but the coordination with social and psychological services and the capacities of state psychological care institutions is highly insufficient to combat the challenges of bullying, violence and support classroom management by teachers. Schools and their staff need separate instruction sheets on how to work with cases of bullying and violence.

3 | Educational Justice

Social justice issues are presented with indicators like accessibility of preschool education, the physical accessibility of schools, the organization of school meals, and the challenges of implementing all-day school programs. Statistical data shows the main obstacles on the way of becoming a more equitable and inclusive educational system. The gross enrollment ratio of students in schools for 2024/25 was 90,4 % with a certain positive tendency in relation to the previous years, while the enrollment in high school was about 82 %. The reason for this number is probably about the engagement of teenagers in labour, as a result of what about 17 % of teenagers are dropping out of the education system at the important stage for choosing a profession.

In the given case of parents' free choice of school regardless of their area of residence, a professional state structure for assessing and monitoring the quality of education is necessary, which will not allow the polarization of schools and the worsening of the rift between private and public schools.

Accessibility of Preschool Education in Armenia

The number of children with access to preschool education has significantly increased in 2024-25 due to at least 235 newly built or reconstructed kindergartens in the framework of the Government program "300 schools and 500 kindergartens". Still financial resources for preschool education are often insufficient, leading to uneven service provision across communities. Discrimination in access to preschool education is evident, with Yerevan offering free services while other communities charge fees. Many large towns, including Yerevan, have long waiting lists for kindergartens. The sustainability of newly built kindergartens is also questionable due to limited municipal budgets. In most of the surveyed communities, on average 20-50 percent of preschool age children don't have access to preschool education. Recommendations include improving child registration, evaluating educational needs,

pursuing financial equalization for communities, and amending legislation to mandate preschool-aged children's registration.

Physical Accessibility of Schools

Despite Armenia's policy of inclusion since the early 2000s and the existence of construction norms for accessibility, many schools still do not meet these standards. Recommendations include creating a dedicated accessibility monitoring mechanism and a centralized technical support mechanism to assist schools in making necessary changes.

Educational Progress and Poverty

Research shows a strong link between educational outcomes and poverty, with socio-economically disadvantaged children at greater risk of academic underachievement. In Armenia, child poverty is high, especially in rural areas, and teachers often lack training on how poverty impacts student success. The impact of equality and poverty on children should be incorporated into teacher training and professional development programs, providing educators with tools and methods to work effectively with children in poverty. Researchers also recommend strengthening collaboration among schools, social services, and psychopedagogical bodies to provide prompt and targeted support to children from vulnerable families.

Armenia's School Meals: Nationalized, Standards-Driven, Scaling to Yerevan

Armenia's "School Feeding" is a milestone-driven national program delivering daily hot, balanced meals to 100,000+ primary pupils (including 5-year-olds) in all ten regions of Armenia. Launched with WFP in 2010, phased state take-over in 2015–2022, fully state-funded since 2023, and now preparing the capital roll-out after completing feasibility and infrastructure assessments in Yerevan. Facilitated by the state-founded School Feeding & Child Welfare Agency (SFCW Agency), the program sets national standards, manages capacity development training for program implementation actors including parents, upgrades canteens and kitchens, and plans to run electronic management systems. Menus are nutritionist-designed and aligned to strict standards (reduced salt/sugar, whole grains, diverse fruit/veg). Schools add innovation through greenhouses, orchards/berry gardens, and agro-clubs. Proven impacts include better learning readiness and health, local job creation (especially for women), and reduced household food costs. The government needs to strengthen efforts to systematically close remaining issues—stabilizing supplies for remote schools, improving accessibility for children with disabilities, introducing modular kitchen models where hot meals aren't yet feasible, phasing inclusion of upper grades, and expanding digitization and waste-management practices.

All-Day School Program

The current all-day learning procedure is limited, often emphasizes inequalities, and is underutilized. Issues include parental inability to pay in rural areas, unclear funding mechanisms for disadvantaged students, insufficient allocated hours, and low teacher wages, which can lead to stigmatization and a focus on grades rather than knowledge. A comparative analysis with an expanded all-day school model implemented by the Participatory School Educational Foundation showed significant positive impacts on educational, demographic, and socio-economic indicators in disadvantaged and border communities. Recommendations include replication of the model piloting it in a group of disadvantaged and border communities of Armenia.

4 | Educational Outcomes and Evaluation

The study revealed significant difficulties for most teachers in applying the new assessment system, both technically and in terms of content. However, it suggests that fostering a participatory and cooperative culture in educational institutions, deepening competence-based assessment along with inter-agency cooperation, could enhance effectiveness and improve education quality. The new system's application is hindered by teachers' difficulties in diagnostic and formative assessments, often leading to a superficial implementation of quality education measures. Surveyed teachers implement both point-based and formative assessments, using various rubrics and valuing self- and peer-assessment. Qualitative changes observed at the end of the academic year in classes using the new standard include students being less dependent on grades, developing critical-analytical thinking, cooperation, and project-based work skills. It is necessary to strengthen educational outcome evaluation for 9th-grade graduating classes in 2025-26 due to the introduction of competence-based final examinations implying measurable tools (such as operators) and adding them into the General Education standard.

Holistic Evaluation

The research on holistic assessment emphasizes developing teachers' professional and leadership competencies to foster educational equity and community development. The majority of surveyed students involved in leadership-driven innovative programs realized their communities' potential and felt they grew as leaders. Recommendations include organizing frequent external assessments in schools and monitoring challenges, implementing categorical instead of point-based grading for projects to encourage research and creativity, educating parents about the assessment system, equipping classrooms with technology for online assessment to reduce paperwork, reducing class sizes to improve effectiveness and prevent a purely formal approach to assessment.

5 | Educational Policy, Governance and Funding

While the National Assembly has increased the education allocations in absolute terms (from 142 billion AMD in 2019 to 250 billion AMD in 2023), the government has not fully utilized these funds (only 219 billion drams were used in 2023). Despite the increase in absolute funding, education's share as a percentage of GDP and as a percentage of state budget expenditures is decreasing. According to 2026-2028 mid-term expenditure program, the government plans to reduce allocations to education.

Significant management issues occur within the education and school system. The new institute of administrative-economic coordinator has been introduced, but the division of rights and responsibilities between directors and coordinators is unclear, hindering problem-solving for directors. The education and school management system is highly complex and fragmented. Various bodies, including the Ministry of ESCS, the Ministry of Defense, 10 regional administrations, and the Yerevan Municipality, are involved in public education management, with no single entity responsible for the "Public Education" program of the state budget. It is positive that the Education Inspection Body has begun to develop quality standards for school inspections. Also transferring the educational management of all schools from regional departments to the Ministry of ESCS may have a positive impact, but the Ministry needs to fill the gaps by developing serious substantive, analytical and managerial capabilities.

There are several problems in the school principal selection and appointment process. Particularly, shortcomings occur in the training and preparation of candidates and lack of skills to design school development programs, noting the absence of institutions preparing education managers in Armenia. There are shortages in Armenian language and literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology teachers. Recommendations include developing a new, fact-based development program for education, increasing funding for general education, requiring a report on the performance of final outcome indicators, creating a state-guaranteed course for future principal candidates, encouraging active civic participation in school councils, simplifying the governance system, and making teacher and principal positions more attractive.

Corruption Risks in the Public Education System

Research on corruption in the public education system of Armenia reveals various corruption risks, including nepotism in recruitment and promotion processes, unequal treatment and favoritism by school management, unequal treatment of students, low level of participation in textbook selection and undue interference in student evaluations. Recommendations include improvement and control of the procedures for teacher recruitment and promotion, conducting training and discussions on teacher codes of conduct, their application, and the harm caused by unethical behavior, encouraging and investigating whistleblowing about corruption and unethical behavior in schools and taking appropriate responsibility measures.

About Participatory School

The activity of Participatory School Educational Foundation (PSEF) is aimed to promote participatory culture and competence-based education in Armenian schools.

Our departments involve about 90 specialists who have trained more than 3,000 teachers and headmasters since 2021 using state certified modules.

Participatory School played an active role in the development of new competence-based General Education Standard of Armenia in 2018-2020 and strongly advocated for the introduction of key competences in it.

In 2023, the Participatory School interdisciplinary Textbook working group developed the first Armenian competence-based textbooks in Mathematics, History of Armenia, Social Studies, Environment etc.

Since April 2023, the Foundation is one of the authorized organizations to evaluate the School development programs of headmaster candidates.



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