

**Toward Universal Learning**  
Implementing Assessment to Improve Learning  
(Report No. 3 of 3  
Learning Metrics Task Force)

*UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution,  
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**Introduction:**

*Toward Universal Learning: Recommendations from the Learning Metrics Task Force* presents the full set of recommendations of the Learning Metrics Task Force, a multi-stakeholder group of 30 organizations that met from July 2012 through September 2013. The 18-month process that led to development of these recommendations is described in detail in a series of three reports under the title *Toward Universal Learning*. The third report addresses how the measurement of learning can be implemented to improve education quality.

**The Global Education Challenge**

Evidence shows that learning levels rather than years spent in school are what drive many social and economic returns on investment in education, including employability, productivity and growth (Brookings Institution, 2011). According to estimates in the 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2012):

- Approximately 120 million children either never make it to school or drop out before their fourth year.
- At least 250 million primary school-age children around the world are not able to read, write or count well enough to meet minimum learning standards, including girls and boys who have spent at least four years in school.
- 200 million adolescents, including those who complete secondary school, do not have the skills they need for life and employment.

A global data gap on learning outcomes is holding back progress on education quality. Because many countries lack sufficient data and capacity to systematically measure and track learning outcomes over time, evidence-based decision making and accountability become impossible. There is a critical need for robust data to understand the full scale of the learning crisis. Only then can we target policy to address areas of need, track progress and hold ourselves to account.

**Recommendations Toward Universal Learning**

Motivated by these challenges, and with the ultimate goal of creating better learning experiences for children and youth around the world, the Learning Metrics Task Force was convened by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution beginning in July 2012. Through a highly inclusive, multi-stakeholder process, the education community has reached a consensus on the skills and competencies that are important for all children and youth to develop and a small set of indicators that are feasible and desirable to track at the global level. The global task force of 30 member organizations, working groups comprised of 186 technical experts, and more than 1,700 consultation participants from 118 countries have worked together over the past 18 months to make the following recommendations.

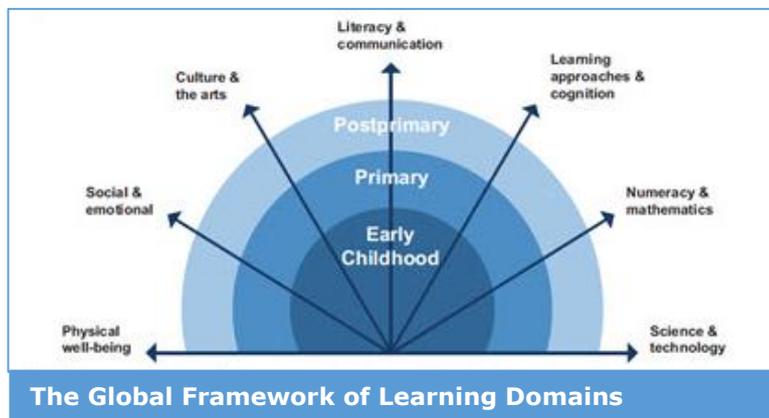
Recommendation 1: A Global Paradigm Shift: The task force calls for a global shift in focus and investment from universal access to access *plus* learning. The collection of better data on learning is central to that effort. Learning measurement can be a highly effective intervention if the results are used to improve the quality of children's learning experiences and outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Learning Competencies: All children and youth develop competencies across seven domains of learning. The task force recommends that education systems offer opportunities for children and youth to master competencies in the seven domains of learning that are essential as they prepare children and youth for their future lives and livelihoods.

## Highlight

The Global Framework of Learning Domains can and should apply to the wide range of settings where intentional learning takes place, including but not limited to formal schooling, community education systems and non- formal education programs.

**Recommendation 3: Learning Indicators for Global Tracking:** The task force recommends a small set of learning indicators to be tracked globally (meaning in all countries). These indicators measure fundamental learning opportunities over a child’s educational career. They were chosen based on an extensive review of existing measures and an effort to address all domains of learning while presenting a framework that is feasible for all countries.



**Recommendation 4: Supporting countries:** The task force recommends that countries lead, with the support of regional and international actors, a process to: diagnose the quality of their assessment systems; convene stakeholders; and assess the necessary technical and financial resources required to improve learning measurement and outcomes. This involves minimizing the gap between what is currently assessed and the country’s vision for what children and youth should learn, and leveraging the wide range of actors at the national level – from parents, teachers, nongovernmental organizations to governments – who have a role to play in improving learning outcomes. At the international level, this involves developing a better mechanism for existing actors to support countries in measuring learning.

**Learning Indicators for Global Tracking**

Areas of Measurement	Description of Indicators
<b>Learning for All</b>	Combine measures of completion and learning (reading proficiency at the end of primary school) into one indicator.
<b>Age and Education Matter for Learning</b>	Measure timely entry, progression and completion of schooling, and population-based indicators to capture those who do not enter or leave school early.
<b>Reading</b>	Measure foundational skills by grade 3 and proficiency by the end of primary school.
<b>Numeracy</b>	Measure basic skills by end of primary school and proficiency by lower secondary school.
<b>Ready to Learn</b>	Measure acceptable levels of early learning and development across a subset of domains by the time a child enters primary school.
<b>Citizen of the World</b>	Measure, among youth, the demonstration of values and skills necessary for success in their communities, countries and the world.
<b>Breadth of Learning Opportunities</b>	Track exposure to learning opportunities across all seven domains of learning.

### Supporting Countries

<b>Technical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Move forward on agreed-upon learning measures for global tracking.</li> <li>● Develop new learning measures for tracking within and across countries through an inclusive and consultative process.</li> <li>● Set up quality assurance mechanisms to evaluate tools.</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop tools for self-diagnosis of strengths and weaknesses of current assessment systems.</li> <li>● Support communities of practice.</li> <li>● Promote sharing of expertise, lessons learned and examples of effective practices.</li> </ul>
<b>Political</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promote a culture of measurement and effective use of assessment data.</li> <li>● Promote a shift in focus from access to access plus learning.</li> <li>● Engage civil society in a grassroots movement to measure and improve learning.</li> <li>● Mobilize financial resources for this work.</li> </ul>

**Recommendation 5: Equity:** Measurement of learning must include an explicit focus on equity, with particular attention to inequalities within countries.

## Highlight

**Recommendation 6: Assessment as a Public Good:** Measures for globally tracked indicators must be a public good, with tools, documentation and data made freely available.

**Recommendation 7: Taking Action:** Stakeholders must take action to ensure the right to learn for all children and youth.

### A Call to Action

All stakeholders working in the field of education, including teachers, school leaders, local education authorities, education ministries and donors, should define and measure learning broadly and across multiple domains and educational stages. The lessons learned from the work of the task force will be invaluable to post-2015 decision makers and ministries of education as they prepare to make the paradigm shift from access to access *plus* learning within their own systems.

### The Global Learning Crisis

The benefits of education – for national development, individual prosperity, health and social stability – are well known, but for these benefits to accrue, children in school have to be learning. According to estimates in the 2012 EFA Global Monitoring Report, at least 250 million primary school-age children around the world are not able to read, write or count well enough to meet minimum learning standards, including those children who have spent at least four years in school (UNESCO, 2012).

#### **Conclusion: A Call to Action**

- *Education and learning are the responsibility of a wide range of actors, and robust measurement ensures that these actors uphold the right to learn for all children and youth.*
- *All stakeholders working in the field of education, including teachers, school leaders, local education authorities, education ministries and donors, should define and measure learning broadly, across multiple domains and educational stages.*
- *National governments should ensure that priorities in measurement are matched with the appropriate financing and allocate more resources to the measurement of learning outcomes and to tracking students' progress.*
- *Civil society groups should advocate for robust assessment systems that demonstrate the transformative power of reliable data on learning outcomes.*
- *Advocacy efforts should be targeted not only at national governments but also at parents, caregivers and communities so that they can take action to ensure children are learning and hold leaders to account.*
- *Regional organizations should identify good practices within countries and facilitate shared learning across countries.*
- *Multilateral agencies, especially those participating in the EFA movement (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and the World Bank), should ensure that programming reflects a commitment to the measurement of learning outcomes as a step towards improving overall outcomes for all children, beyond literacy and numeracy. Donors should endorse a broad definition of learning across the seven domains, and finance the collection, analysis and dissemination of data at the country level*
- *Assessment institutions and universities should share technical expertise and work collaboratively with a diverse group of education stakeholders to develop the necessary new tools for assessing learning.*
- *Testing companies, publishers, and other private sector entities should donate employee time and financial resources to help develop innovative assessment tools, new technologies to make data collection more individualized and efficient, open source measures as public goods, and new ways of efficiently collecting and analyzing assessment data that are feasible in low-resource environments.*

**Read the full report at the official website:** [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/toward-universal-learning-implementing-assessment-to-improve-learning-2014-en\\_0.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/toward-universal-learning-implementing-assessment-to-improve-learning-2014-en_0.pdf)

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