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DECISION MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN GEORGIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

**THE ROLES OF EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTERS
POLICY ANALYSIS PAPER**

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ACRONYM LIST

BoT	Board of Trustees
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EMP	Education Management Project
ESIDA	Education and Science Infrastructure Development Agency
ERC	Education Resource Center
LG	Local Government
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
SRC	School Report Card
TPDC	Teacher Professional Development Center
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

INTRODUCTION

To improve school accountability and ultimately education quality, Georgian education policy regarding decentralized management should look to more effectively utilize its decentralized human resources. This paper presents a brief overview of the reform conducted so far in the Georgian education system since the rose revolution, lists problems and challenges existing within the current system, alternative policy approaches available to MoES, and recommended approaches supported by Education Management Project's (EMP) recent research and international decentralization experience. Specifically, this paper recommends that the MoES clarify ERC roles and responsibilities and decentralize targeted new functions to ERCs within an accountability framework. While delegating targeted decision making power to ERCs could have a positive effect on decentralized management. It should only be considered in the future after a review of ERC performance with new functions and clarified roles.

Situation Analysis/Problem Statement

Since 2003 the education system has yielded manifold changes in many aspects of governance in Georgia. The government declared education to be one of the priorities and a number of sweeping changes have taken place in the field of education and science and in particular. General education schools were converted to autonomous Legal Entities of Public Law and are funded directly from the MoES. The government instituted a system of voucher finance in which parents can choose a school for their child and that school receives state funds allocated to educate one student. On paper, this system empowers parents as consumers of education because they determine where the money goes, thereby encouraging schools to meet parental expectations for education outcomes. Each school has a Board of Trustees (BOT), responsible for electing the school director, approving the budget, and overseeing school management. Education Resource Centers (ERC) replaced local education departments and are tasked with facilitating (but do not controlling) schools' educational activities by collecting data, conducting research, and organizing capacity development activities. All of these decentralization reforms placed more authority to make important financial and personnel management decisions in the hands of people (BOTs and Principals) located physically closer to the education clients (children and their parents). Legally, this system enabled those clients to better hold the school decision-makers accountable for the results of their institutions.

Although general education reform has achieved significant accomplishments in improved management and governance, it still faces difficulties with certain reformed areas. For example:

- *General education financing.* Over 60% of schools are in deficit and ask for additional funding outside of the funding provided through the government's funding formula.
- *BoT participation in school management.* The intention that BoTs would play an active role in assisting school principals in the school management has not been realized.
- *ERCs as resource centers.* ERCs are not perceived by themselves or schools as highly useful resources to improve school quality, but instead as "postmen" as they primarily serve as a conduit for information between the central Ministry and schools. ERC personnel are empowered to make few meaningful decisions. They perform many useful — even necessary — tasks, but these tasks are not well suited to fostering accountability and, thus, to improving educational outputs and outcomes. ERCs' current responsibilities combine to under-utilize and disempower their professional staff, an otherwise potentially valuable human resource.

In summary, despite the recent changes to the education system, problems with the funding system, BoT participation, and ERC effectiveness still remain, which undermine school effectiveness. To overcome these problems, the MoES needs to consider key reforms aimed at strengthening the accountability system in Georgia. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for BoTs and ERCs, related to holding schools accountable for educational outputs and outcomes will lead to improved education quality. Such accountability is particularly important in a system, like Georgia, with significant school autonomy and local control of decision-making. Officially, the Georgian education system has decentralized an impressive range of responsibilities and decisions to the school level. However, the extent to which schools are truly autonomous in practice is still inconsistent across schools and regions. Deepening and improving decentralization reform will depend partially on better alignment of the ERC activities with the tasks recommended below, which better support school autonomy. Furthermore, re-affirmation by the MoES of its commitment to strengthen the school autonomy model is essential.

From an International Perspective

Conceptually and administratively, entities similar to ERCs are relatively common and sometimes effective administrative components in decentralization reforms worldwide. In particular, most similar units in other countries have some combination of (1) deeper monitoring and evaluation responsibilities, (2) more administrative functions, and/or most commonly (3) more significant curricular and professional development functions. Holding service ERC-like entities accountable for delivering expected results is key to successful education outcomes, and is most effective when these entities simultaneously receive the support they need to succeed. This claim was demonstrated by The World Bank's World Development Report 2004 (WDR04) — entitled “Making Services Work for the Poor” — which focused on issues of accountability in service provision, including education. Overall, the evidence suggests that direct client (parents, students) involvement in the management of services can yield positive results when the services involved allow a relatively small production scale and simple management challenges (King and Ozler, 1998). International expertise also recommends taking into consideration the following conditions while discussing an accountability system:

- Accountability requires clear delineation of authority and responsibility as well as transparent and understandable information about results (both educational and financial).
- There can be no accountability without accurate, timely, and reliable information, data, and analysis of school performance and finances.
- A working EMIS is the backbone of such a system of accountability, but it is a necessary rather than a sufficient step in achieving the goal.
- Decentralization of real decision-making power to schools or school councils is a means of increasing the voice of education's clients and can significantly increase parental participation in the school. Alternatively, school councils which are only advisory in nature cannot sustain parental participation.
- For decentralization directly to schools to be successful, principals must acquire new skills in leadership and management skills of finances, teachers, and the community

Finally, of relevance to the decentralization reforms in Georgia, local government (LG) is generally uninvolved in education-related decisions, as compared to other countries. However, this does not suggest there should be more involvement of local governments in Georgia. Significantly increasing local government involvement would be a “detour,” and — in fact — local government may not be well-equipped to effectively take on much responsibility in this arena. Georgia will likely want to solidify targeted roles for local government, such as in capital investment, along with solidifying the MoES' commitment to the strong school autonomy model they have designed.

Indeed, fostering accountability is a unique challenge in every country, but the ERCs appear potentially well poised to play a constructive role provided they are themselves managed and trained appropriately.

Overview of Background Research

Research methodology. The research that this policy paper is based upon was a combination of desk and field research that revealed a clear picture of the current education management challenges in Georgia. EMP specifically conducted two key pieces of research in Georgia that contributed to this policy paper, an assessment of school principals capacity¹ conducted in the autumn of 2009 and ERC research² conducted in the spring of 2010. Data for the school principal assessment was collected through interviews and focus groups. Data for the ERC survey was collected through methods listed below:

- *OECD survey:* a survey for identifying the locus of decision-making (from the OECD's "locus of decision-making" method).
- *Focus groups:* with ERC staff, school staff, parents, and other stakeholders in six regions.
- *Five question survey:* for ERC focus group members.
- *Interviews:* with the MoES staff and local government officials.

A final presentation of the detailed findings of the ERC study was provided to the MoES on July 1, 2010.

¹ Khatiashvili, T and Chubinidze, N (2009) School principals' needs assessment;

² Gershberg, A, (2010) Decision making and accountability in Georgia's Education System, The roles of Educational Resource Centers.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

That Would Allow the Georgian MoES to Improve School Accountability and Ultimately Education Quality

Below, we propose three options for MoES to strategically improve school accountability and ultimately education quality by more effectively utilizing its decentralized human resources for education management.

Policy Alternative Number One

Maintaining the status quo where the roles and responsibilities of the system players (MoES, ERCs, BoTs, and LGs) remains the same.

The first alternative for the MoES is to maintain the status quo. In other words, the Ministry will continue ongoing reforms related to education system, but not make any specific policy changes related to accountability system that would modify or clarify the management roles and responsibilities of MoES central staff, ERCs, BoTs, or LG to the existing system.

Pro

- *Public has become accustomed to the new system.* The Georgian public has acclimated to the new system. Changes in the system might cause resistance from the community as well as negative publicity if not appropriately explained. Significant investments in public relations will be necessary for persuading communities and education professionals that system changes are important and fundamentally necessary to improve educational quality.

Con

- *Management roles and responsibilities are unclear in the current system.* While the law on general education states certain areas of responsibility for ERCs and schools, each entity's responsibility is not always evident and the lines between the ERC and school responsibilities are often blurred. In addition, with some policy changing in an inconsistent fashion from minister to minister, many managers within the education system (i.e. ERCs, principals, and BOTs) do not understand or support current policy implementation effectively. Maintaining the status quo will not address these issues.
- *In the status quo policy environment, ERCs do not function as true resource centers for the schools.* ERCs' workload is dominated by responding to Ministry information requests. While ERCs spend 45 percent of their time responding to the Ministry, they only spend 25 percent of their time providing support to schools and only 5 percent of their time supporting boards of trustees (BoTs). These findings (Khatiashvili, 2009) confirm that ERCs do a great deal of work that is useful but also fall short of fulfilling their potential to improve accountability and performance.
- *The client accountability envisioned in the Georgian school autonomy models is not working.* The school autonomy model, partially dependant on effectiveness of BoTs, appears to be struggling. The potential reasons for the failure are the following:
 - The lack of discretionary financial resources in the majority of schools does not allow BoTs to exercise one of their major functions - discussing and approving the school budget – as the majority of school funds go toward fixed costs like staff salaries, utilities, and maintenance. Therefore, BoTs cannot provide substantive input about resource allocations as this allocation is essentially predetermined.

- In some schools, principals directly interfere and influence BoT elections and decisions. In some cases principals are strongly lobbying particular candidates for the BoT membership and actively discouraging others from participating, therefore limiting the pool of possible members in the election. Sometimes school principal disregard BoT decisions or make decisions without consulting with them at all.
- Lack of motivation is a common issue for BoTs across Georgia. The reason for that could be parent's busy schedule, low civic awareness, and lack of financial incentives.
- Mostly in rural/mountainous regions, BoT capacity limits the proper fulfillment of the functions prescribed by law. Their education and professional experience is not relevant/sufficient.

By maintaining the status quo, BoTs will not likely improve their functions and therefore improve the client accountability that lacking in the system right now.

- *School principals lack leadership, skills, and qualifications to manage schools effectively.* When schools became independent legal entities of public law, significant decision making power has been delegated to the school level, but a corresponding accountability framework was not fully developed or implemented. A large number of the school principals have had difficulty in transitioning to new roles and responsibilities. As a result, BoTs and principals often look to the central Ministry to make many decisions that the system envisioned as being made by them. Maintaining the status quo will continue the current cycle in which schools do not take responsibility for their decisions and consistently look to the Ministry for guidance in the most basic of matters. In addition, this reliance on the central Ministry undermines the natural accountability envisioned in the system between the community and schools.

Policy Alternative Number Two

To improve school accountability and ultimately education quality, the MoES delegates targeted decision making power to ERCs, decentralizes targeted new functions to ERCs and BoTs, and clarifies ERC roles and responsibilities.

This second alternative suggests delegating targeted decision making power to ERCs and giving new ERCs new functions that will hold schools accountable for educational quality. Such empowerment will allow the MoES to improve the decentralized management of the system by clarifying the accountability framework within schools, BoTs and ERCs, while also allowing local decision makers (BoTs and schools) the freedom to determine how to meet those standards.

Pro

- *International experience demonstrates that local decision making power improves accountability and performance.* ERCs do a great deal of work that is useful, but they fall short of fulfilling their potential to improve accountability and performance. International experience suggests that entities similar to ERCs have deeper monitoring and evaluation responsibilities, more administrative and bureaucratic functions, and/or more significant curricular and professional development functions. ERC roles need to evolve and deepen in some of these areas. ERCs' current responsibilities combine to under-utilize and disempower their professional staff, an otherwise potentially valuable human resource.
- *ERCs will become more effective decentralized stakeholders in school system.* By empowering ERCs, the role of the central Ministry becomes less focused on providing services day to day and more focused on creating standards that define how services should be provided, monitoring the achievement of those standards, working to ensure

that services are provided equitably, and ensuring that schools have the resources and knowledge they need to ensure effective service provision. The World Bank's accountability framework suggests that an organization like an ERC could play an important role related to supporting both client power and the enforcement of the compact between the central government and service providers. Within the context of this framework, ERCs are poised to play the role of managers of frontline service providers (i.e., schools). Though their role is not currently defined in this way, they can effectively ensure that the compact (with its rules and regulations) between the central government and decentralized service providers is clear and followed by schools.

- *Local government and ERCs successfully cooperate on the ground.* This policy alternative would help clarify how local government and the education system should work together more effectively and efficiently. Local governments currently assist schools in transportation, rehabilitation, organization of social and cultural activities, camping programs, and student art work competitions. Local governments also often support education for special needs students by funding teachers' regular visits to student homes. Increasing ERC cooperation with Local governments would allow for the local governments to have a better understanding of how schools in their districts are fairing and to more efficiently provide support. This type of cooperation does not imply that management of education should revert to local governments in anyway. Instead it means the assistance provided by local government is better leveraged as efficiently as possible by ERCs..
- *By delegating targeted decision making power to ERCs and clarifying ERC and BoT roles, the MoES will have more time for policy making, monitoring, and evaluation.* As the role of the central Ministry becomes less focused on providing services day to day and more focused on creating standards that define how services should be provided, monitoring the achievement of those standards, working to ensure that services are provided equitably, and ensuring that schools have the resources and knowledge they need to ensure effective service provision, the equitable delivery of quality education will increase. Clarifying ERC and BoT functions and increasing their ability to make targeted decisions will allow the Ministry to focus on the overall health of the system more effectively, while ensuring that schools provide the services required of them.
- *Empowering ERCs will increase school accountability.* Currently ERCs have a dual role regarding schools, they support and assist schools in their everyday activities (e.g. school budgeting and reporting) while also serving as the arms of the central MoES executing central policy at the local level (i.e. MoES assigns tasks to ERCs and controls/monitors its compliance). ERCs are liaison entities between the schools and the MoES and have no clear responsibility for overseeing school performance. If targeted decision making power is delegated to the ERCs, schools accountability will increase as the education service manager (ERC) is administratively (and often physically) closer to the education service provider (school) and therefore more able to understand the exact issues that schools face and hold them to their legal commitments. It is very difficult for the central Ministry to effectively and efficiently perform this function.
- *New roles and responsibilities for ERCs will foster community involvement.* Community's voice and participation is important in improving school performance. Providing new roles and responsibilities to ERCs like implementing parent satisfaction surveys that asses how satisfied parents are with school outcomes and then publishing these results in a school report card will motivate parents towards greater involvement as they will recognize that the education system is actively looking for their input and engagement.

- *Local education/community leaders (ERCs/LGs) know local problems better than the central MoES.* ERCs know the local problems and capacity well. Therefore, increasing their role in facilitating local decision making will improve the effectiveness of those local decisions. This will save time (over consulting with the MoES and other agencies) and provide quicker results.

Con

- *Majority of ERCs are not currently willing to exercise more power.* ERCs are happy with their decision making power and are not interested in increasing their authority as they do not seem eager to be held accountable for results themselves. Instead, they wish to have more time to work closer with school and community. ERC resistance toward decision making power is based on the following reasons:
 - They perceive that the delegation of additional rights to ERCs could cause conflict and increase tensions between ERCs and schools. For example, some people might exceed their rights and use power for their own benefit. Thus, the trustful and collaborative relationships will be jeopardized;
 - Increased decision making power logically increases ERCs responsibilities (over the decisions they make), therefore majority of ERCs prefer that MoES makes decisions and that responsibility for those decision lies with the central government;
 - More power might encourage corruption and therefore steps must be taken to ensure this does not occur.
- *ERCs do not have sufficient resources or human capacity to take on a greater decision making role.* According to MoES officials, the majority of ERC staff are underperforming and MoES staff invests significant energy and time to check and improve the information ERCs collect for the MoES. If ERCs are empowered to make targeted decisions locally it may cause political problems for the MoES as the Ministry will have to take political responsibility for ERC decisions and the outcomes of those decisions. Therefore, if targeted decision making power is delegated to ERCs, this must be combined with human capacity development as well as increased resources (e.g. transportation funds) to ensure that ERCs are able to properly take on these responsibilities.
- *May be politically difficult.* ERC empowerment may cause political complications for the Ministry. Firstly, schools might react negatively to such change, since new functions will likely make them accountable to ERCs in some fashion for their performance (this occurs now, but is implicit rather than explicit in the relationship). Secondly, ERCs might feel uncomfortable with the new decision-making functions as responsibility currently resides with the MoES. Finally, such empowerment needs political will from the top management within MoES and national centers related to general education. If a consensus is not built that this change is needed, it will likely have difficulty in implementation.

Policy Alternative Number Three

To improve school accountability and ultimately education quality, the MoES decentralizes targeted new functions to ERCs (support principal evaluation process using new principal standards, oversee school financial management, support BoTs) and clarifies ERC roles and responsibilities. Delegating targeted decision making power to ERCs would only be considered in the future, once ERC performance with new functions and clearer roles will be evaluated.

This policy alternative incorporates all the pros of Policy Alternative Number Two (to varying degrees) while minimizing the cons. While ERCs under this option would not have

increased decision making power, they would be playing an increased and important role in the improved functioning of the system.

Pro

- *Politically popular decision.* MoES will introduce innovations without significant financial and time costs. In other words, it will be an easy win for the MoES as 1) the community and stakeholders will benefit from the new functions, which aim to improve education outcomes at schools and therefore 2) if successfully implemented, MoES will get positive publicity.
- *New functions will raise the efficacy of the entities involved in the education system.* Introducing new school report cards will motivate school principals and BoTs for better performance.
- *MoES supports the current system as it allows for better quality control.* The MoES supports the current system, since it allows for oversight for all ongoing education processes. According to the MoES, current weakness in the system are not caused by a weak accountability system, rather they can be attributed to the lack of human capacity and development (school/BoT/ERC).
- *New functions will enable ERCs to function as true resource centers (assisting and overseeing school/BoT activities).* This option will allow ERCs to fulfill the role for which they were created, which is to provide assistance to schools as they work to meet the curriculum/quality standards set by the MoES and the expectations of community stakeholders.
- *Maintains relationship between ERCs and schools.* Giving ERCs too much decision making power at one time could lead to poor implementation of that power. Schools and BoTs should perceive ERCs as partners and not as entities who are created for controlling them. This policy option will allow the Ministry to walk the fine line between using ERCs as an entity that helps improve accountability and an entity that looks to control schools. Changes in roles and responsibilities must keep this distinction in mind.
- *A short term win that paves the way for long term improvement.* Although Policy Alternative Three does not empower ERCs right away, it allows the MoES to observe how ERCs are dealing with assigned functions, discover their strengths and weaknesses, and provide support where necessary. It will allow the MoES to determine whether ERCs will be able in future to take responsibility as decision making entities, and whether they will handle delegated functions accordingly. It also gives ERCs possibility to adapt to new functions before assigning them increase power.

Con

- *ERCs' workload becomes unmanageable if the delegation of additional responsibilities are not well managed.* The new functions will not be successful without clearly delineating an accountability system, thus, affecting only ERC workload without making changes in the system. The quality of the ERC work could be diminished if this option is not carefully implemented. These changes will mostly affect ERCs, as they are the major service providers in the current education system (dealing with MoES, schools, BoTs and LGs). As the recent ERC study has shown, ERCs are already overwhelmed with their current activities. Therefore, if ERC schedule/tasks remain the same and new functions are added, the quality and efficiency of their work will likely decrease.

- *ERCs do not have sufficient resources or human capacity.* ERCs do not have sufficient human and technical resources to implement new functions. Since ERC staff believe that their work is extremely overloaded, additional functions might cause more complication in their every day schedule. The number of ERC staff is fixed and they cannot afford hiring staff for additional help.

Policy Evaluation Criteria

Below we present the definitions of the evaluation criteria we have selected to evaluate the three policy alternative presented. After the definitions we present a table with each recommended alternative placed side by side for comparison. The criteria in order of importance are:

- *Political will.* Willingness of the government of Georgia to implement the alternative based upon perceived political acceptance and the governments priorities.
- *Impact on educational quality.* How policy will affect the outputs and outcomes of the general education in Georgia.
- *Impact on accountability/decentralization.* How a policy alternative will influence accountability within the education system to strengthen school autonomy model in Georgia.
- *Feasibility.* The degree of policy implementation difficulty and how it can be brought to a successful end (i.e. carried through and accomplished).
- *Cost.* The total spent for goods or services including money and labor.
- *Cost effectiveness.* The relationship between a policy offer and the monetary inputs required for a desired outcome.
- *Time.* The time the particular policy requires for implementation and when the desired outcome is expected.
- *Stakeholders' perceptions.* The anticipated attitude of people who are directly influenced or involved by changes in the system towards the policy.
- *Public perception.* The anticipated public attitude and reactions towards the policy.

Alternatives	Policy Evaluation Criteria								
	Political Will	Impact on Accountability/Decentralization	Impact on educational outcomes	Feasibility	Cost	Cost Effectiveness	Time	Stakeholders (ERC/School/BoT/LG) Perceptions	Public Perception
1. Status quo: Education system and roles and responsibilities of the system players (MoES, ERC, BoT, LG) remain the same	Yes	Negative	negative	N/A	low	low	N/A	negative	negative
2. MoES delegates greater decision making power at the local level and gives new functions to ERC/BoTs	No	Positive	positive	difficult	high	high	long term	positive	neutral
3 MoES doesn't increase decision making power at the local level but gives additional functions to ERCs (e.g. create school performance system, oversee school financial management, support BoTs)	Yes	Positive	positive	medium-difficult	medium	high	short term	positive	neutral

RECOMMENDATION

Policy Alternative Number Three

To improve school accountability and ultimately education quality, the MoES decentralizes targeted new functions to ERCs (support principal evaluation process using new principal standards, oversee school financial management, support BoTs) and clarifies ERC roles and responsibilities. Delegating targeted decision making power to ERCs would only be considered in the future once ERC performance with new functions and clearer roles will be reviewed.

Alternative number three is considered the best option for improving education outcomes and improving the current school autonomy-based system. This alternative contains almost all pros (to varying degrees) that alternative number two includes. These include:

- ERCs will become more effective decentralized stakeholders in school system
- New roles and responsibilities of ERCs will foster community involvement
- Local education/community leaders (ERC/Local Government) know local problems better than the central MoES
- Politically popular decision
- New functions will raise the efficacy of the entities involved in the education system
- The MoES supports the current system as it allows for better quality control
- New functions will enable ERCs to function as true resource centers (assisting and overseeing school/BoT activities)
- Maintains relationship between ERCs and schools
- A short term win that paves the way for long term improvement

Alternative three has lower costs and a similar anticipated effectiveness in comparison to alternative two. This alternative provides the MoES the possibility to assess the capacity of ERCs to consider their empowerment in future. Additionally, ERCs and BoTs with improved capacity will manage processes more effectively and allocate resources (which are scarce) more efficiently than a central entity. New functions and responsibilities assigned to ERCs will become the basis for preparing the education system for improved accountability that will lead to effective decentralization and will strengthen the school autonomy model. If new duties and responsibilities are successfully handled by ERCs, targeted decision making power will be delegated to them. ERCs and BOTs need not have carte blanche in overseeing school finances or in evaluating school principals for example. They instead should be given a clear framework that clearly delineates what kinds of decisions they are responsible for and how the Ministry should be involved in others. In addition, building stakeholder and community support for reform initiatives is also very important while initiating these new policies. Below we lay out steps that would support the implementation of policy recommendation three.

Proposed Actions for the Ministry of Education and Science

1. *Rethink and revise ERC roles and responsibilities.* ERCs have the possibility of providing sorely needed oversight of schools in many areas. This oversight should be clearly defined to ensure that ERCs are not controlling schools, just ensuring that they fulfill their mandate to the level expected by the Ministry. Below we provide specific areas in which ERCs roles and responsibilities should be revised.
 - *Oversee school financial compliance with the official norms and regulations.* ERCs should oversee and support school budgeting, financial management, and accounting, thus addressing the problem that there is poor financial management skills at many schools that prevent understanding and dissemination of useful budget data to many stakeholders. Again, this doesn't mean that ERCs are responsible for school budgets, they would be the initial group that should recognize when school are having financial difficulty, report this to the

Ministry, and be the first option in helping school look for creative solution to these financial issues. This role should be planned carefully with the current changes envisioned in the funding formula and its roll out.

There are several reasons why the ERCs should play an increased role in school finance, budgeting, and accounting, both by offering formal training to school-level stakeholders and by providing more informal assistance either by request or when ERC staff determine (within a framework provided to them by the Ministry) that a school needs help. These reasons include:

- *Perform financial oversight and compliance functions.* Greater involvement by trained ERC staff would enable them to provide financial and compliance oversight for schools that are not meeting minimum financial obligation established by the Ministry (e.g. schools that are incurring deficits). While this role could be envisioned as punitive, it is recommended that the ERCs provide support to schools in overcoming their deficits or other financial problems. In addition, if schools are having trouble with other management or compliance issues, ERCs could do desk audits upon request to assist them in establishing systems to ensure compliance. This type of assistance would free up central Ministry staff for other efforts.
- *Promote transparency.* Being able to provide school budget data to parents, BoTs, and school staff would promote transparency and, thus, accountability.
- *Support effective autonomous school planning and performance.* In theory, school autonomy should allow schools to develop and implement school improvement plans that both improve performance and parent satisfaction. However, those plans will only be effective if school staff have solid and reliable budgeting and accounting skills and if other stakeholders understand the basics of how the school budget works and what the trends are over time. ERCs sit on BoTs and can play a role in helping these entities to more effectively engage with school principal in a participatory process for budget approval.
- *ERCs inform parents about school activities and effectiveness.* In particular, parents can perform a watchdog function if they understand how the school budget works and what to expect in a given year (specifically BOT members). These parents should also be able to provide insights about school planning and their own preferences with this budget information. It is recommended that ERCs provide more substantive support to BoTs, specifically budgeting and financial oversight roles that BoTs should fulfill.

The MoES must set the norms, rules, and regulations about school-level budgeting, curriculum, and professional development. The ERCs would, then, verify compliance of the school budgets with regulations.

- *Facilitating SRC implementation.* The ERC would be the right institution to play an important role in helping design and implement School Report Cards effectively in Georgia, particularly in urban areas where parents actually have a choice between schools. When such choices exist for village or mountain residents (especially at the secondary level), ERCs should be able to present objective information to support parents' choice. Finally, in mountain areas where school choice is not an option, school report cards will allow parents to more easily evaluate their school's performance and hold school leaders responsible for performance. It is recommended that MoES develop a school report card format that includes data readily available from the EMIS so that it can be consolidated and shared efficiently.

ERCs' role — as parent information centers — would not be to recommend or rank particular schools, but to provide information to help parents understand the differences in schools so they can make more informed choices. The ERCs would also need to disseminate (though not

create) comparative analyses of school performance in a manner that is comprehensible to parents and accurately contextualizes the MoES' ranking of schools.

ERCs could take the lead in implementing SRCs and ensuring they are distributed to parents and schools. We do not propose that ERCs design the SRC or the parent survey, or perform the analysis upon which they would be based; these are jobs for the central MoES. However, ERCs can play a crucial role by overseeing the collection of data for the parent satisfaction survey and distributing the SRCs to both parents and schools. ERCs would also be the primary source of information and guidance on how to interpret them and use SRCs. For instance, they would help schools strategize ways to improve their performance or assist parents in using the SRCs to express their preferences for school planning or monitor school performance.

- *Support personnel management.* ERCs should monitor and support human resource management (HRM) processes, thus helping address the problem that ineffective hiring, dismissal, and performance management processes that harm school autonomy and accountability. This does not mean that individual hires or dismissals are approved by ERCs. Instead, this means that ERC would be a clearly designated resource for schools to turn to in the event that they have difficult questions in the hiring or dismissal of staff. This assistance should improve the current issue with numerous teacher dismissals being overturn in the court system.
 - *Evaluate school principal's performance.* ERCs should play a role in monitoring and evaluating school principal's performance against the official standards and report it to the MoES. This involvement does not insinuate that ERCs should be the entity evaluating principals. Rather, it is recommended that ERCs help ensure that principals are evaluated according to the system defined by MoES. This could mean that BoTs are to evaluate principals and that ERCs are only responsible for reporting the results of those evaluations to the Ministry. As this system is currently being discussed within the Teacher Professional Development Center (TPDC), it is recommended that ERCs' and BoTs' roles in this system should be clarified early on in this process.
 - *Observe BoTs activities.* ERCs should support and oversee functions of school BoTs and foster parental participation, thus helping address the problem that many BoTs do not function well, threatening Georgia's potentially strong school autonomy reform model.
 - *Clarify ERC roles that have not been revised.* The MoES should clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations for performance of ERCs in the functions that they were previously responsible for in addition to new functions, thus helping address the confusion over who is responsible for what in the educational system. This can be achieved by officially adopting the standard job descriptions for ERC staff as well as updating ministerial orders that are relevant to ERC functions. In addition, since the new EMIS will create new demands on ERC staff in some areas and decrease them in others, failure to clarify the roles will threaten that key reform as well.
2. *Continue with EMIS development, including improved and targeted reporting functions.* The MoES has made significant strides in the past six months on developing an information system. To implement ERC enhancement effectively, ERCs roles must transition from primarily collecting data to monitoring data and school performance and providing support to schools in critical areas of need. The continued development and utilization of the EMIS will allow for these changes to occur.
 3. *Implement School Report Cards (SRC).* Currently in Georgia, there is little information available to parents, principals, BoTs, or the central Ministry about schools' educational and/or financial

performance. All stakeholders in our ERC study focus groups and surveys appear to agree that the school a student attends is almost entirely a parental choice. Indeed, Georgia's school voucher model is intended to empower parents to choose the best school for their children. However, choices can only be as good as the information upon which they are based and the leading proposals for school choice in the United States (for example) and elsewhere in the world emphasize the need for an information center to help parents make this choice.

School report cards provide information about the educational and financial performance of each school in a manner that both makes sense to a wide range of stakeholders and allows relatively accurate comparisons between schools. The most effective school report cards include a parent satisfaction survey in addition to financial and student information as an important element to engage parents in their schools' performance. SRCs provide parents and policymakers a tool with which to measure performance over time and to hold schools accountable for gains and losses. Within the MoES, there appears to be considerable interest in such an effort, particularly since doing so would support ongoing efforts in both principal standards and teacher and professional development.

The MoES Minister's recent comments on school "branding" are relevant here as well. On the one hand, the dialogue shows a clear commitment to competition between schools. Vouchers and parental choice, where it exists, should contribute to competition. On the other hand, ideally competition would lead schools to differentiate their offerings so not all schools are striving to attract the exact same students. Rather, they can appeal to particular student and parent goals and preferences. For example, the school "branding" exercise might be used not only to rate schools with stars, but also to help distinguish between schools of different characters (art and design schools, religious schools, foreign language-oriented schools, etc.). Such differentiation would also promote improvements in service delivery by aligning what schools do with what parents and students want.

Finally, a key component of school report cards includes a comparison between the individual school and some other group of schools to demonstrate school performance vis-à-vis the education system. In addition, school report cards can include historical data on a school to show how a school's performance against itself over time. It is important that both of these comparisons be developed and reported carefully as unfair comparisons can lead to unintended consequences. For example, comparing a mountain school in Svaneti to a large urban school will rarely produce useful information to help the school improve. Comparing the school in Svaneti to other schools with similar demographics would allow parents and school leaders to understand how they are fairing under similar circumstances to other schools.

4. *Revise BOT policy.* BoTs can play very positive roles to 1) support effective school autonomy, 2) improve school decision-making and performance, and 3) promote democracy and participatory development. The ERC research study revealed that currently the majority of BoTs do not function effectively (due to a number of reasons described above). Therefore, we suggest that MoES should make three revisions to the BoT policy with the aim of improving BOT effectiveness:

- *Increase the parents/community member to teacher ratio on BOTs.* The current make up of the BoT, with 50 percent of its members parents and 50 percent teachers, creates a situation where principals in schools with functioning BoTs are often beholden to teachers regarding school management and budgetary issues. In addition, many teachers are also parents and in some cases the combination of parent members who are teachers and formal teacher members creates a board in which over 50 percent of its members are teachers. While teacher membership is important to a BoT to ensure that educator voices are represented, we would recommend considering a change in the makeup of the BoT by removing teacher members during the next electing cycle and replacing them with more parents or possibly community members. This reconfiguration will allow for BoT oversight while ensuring that principals

have the ability to implement school policy without on constituency group commanding too much authority.

- *Parent/Teacher members.* Parent positions on BoTs should be held for non teacher parents to ensure that the parent to teacher ratio on the BoT does not include a majority of teachers.
- *Alternative government structure/combined BoTs.* In very rural and mountainous areas there are schools that do not have a large enough population to effectively constitute a BoT (some 48 schools have 15 or fewer students, a total of 170 have 30 or fewer). It is recommended that the MoES seriously consider an alternative governance structure for these schools as BoTs do not seem to be appropriate for these schools due to their extremely low student population. The MoES may also want to create a governance structure that combines these schools virtually and create a BoT to govern multiple small schools. Additionally, it is recommended that a similar principal/management structure be considered for these schools which would combine the role of school principal and other administration functions for multiple small schools.

Once these changes are made to BoT policy, as mentioned in recommendation number one above, it is recommended that ERCs be given a larger role in helping BoTs to fulfill their mandate.

5. *Develop sustainable and long-term capacity building program for ERCs, BoT, and parents.* In multiple decentralization scenarios around the world, high-quality annual training and technical support for education administrators (as well as for school staff seeking to recruit or run elections for members) has proven crucial.

Ministry and international organizations have invested lots of time and energy in assessing training needs, developing materials, and delivering trainings. Although this approach has provided some positive result (increased capacity of trainees), there were certain issues/problems that need to be addressed/considered in the future. These include:

- Training needs are not assessed on a regular basis. Need based training is good, but using proactive approach (identifying problems in an early stage) would be more beneficial as it will help avoid unintended consequences. Regular assessments will reveal the problems quicker and therefore it would be easier to address them.
- During the last year a number of training materials were developed and trainers trained. Due to the high turnover of MoES staff it is difficult to maintain an institutional memory, in other words a database of training materials and trainers. The MoES should develop a formal system of archiving training materials and keeping a record of qualified trainers. The MoES should also seek to revise/update existing training materials so that they are used again (rather than developing new training materials for the same training topic over and over again). We would suggest that the MoES either 1) assign this task to a particular division in the Ministry that manages the education stakeholder trainings or even 2) delegates this authority to a University or Center (independent legal entity) and require they manage the training assessment, development, delivery, and evaluation process

Below is the list of training topics that we believe are crucial for the education stakeholders:

	Training Topic	MoES	ERC	Principal	Accountant	BoTs	Parents
1	Data Collection and Management	x	x	x			
2	School monitoring and evaluation	x	x				
3	Developing School Report Cards	x	x	x			
	3.1. Parent satisfaction survey	x	x				x
4	Finance Management and Budgeting		x	x	x	x	
	4.1. Budgeting process		x	x	x	x	
	4.2. Data collection (MoES database)		x	x			
5	Legislation		x	x		x	
	5.1. Education stakeholders roles and responsibilities						
	5.2. National Curriculum		x	x			
	5.3. Principal Standards		x	x		x	
	5.4. Labor law		x	x			
6	Human Resource Management						
	6.1. Personnel search, hiring and promotion policies			x		x	
7	Basic Computer Skills						
	7.1. Excel		x	x			
	7.2. Word		x	x			
	7.3. Power Point		x	x			
	7.4. Outlook		x	x			
	7.5. ORIS Accounting Software		x		x		
8	How to Raise Community Involvement	x	x	x		x	
9	Effective Communications and information sharing	x	x				

6. *Improve communications (MoES – ERC and ERC – ERC)*. While this recommendation seems superficial, it is fundamentally important for all of the above recommendations to be successfully implemented. Creating and adhering to communication guidelines is beneficial for any decentralized organization like the MoES. Below we have outlined some initial communication improvements that are easy wins. We also recognize that the MoES may have recently begun addressing some of these items.

- Ensure clear written instruction when assigning important tasks to ERCs. It is better to have written instructions, otherwise it is difficult to maintain consistency when dealing with 69 bodies and hold each ERC accountable for what they produce.
- Develop a clear schedule for submitting routinely requested information. This will allow ERCs to more effectively plan their data collection work and allow them to spend more time on value added tasks.
- Establish standard turnaround times for all requests made outside of that schedule. A minimum time in many organizations is 48 hours, as this timeframe allows for schools to be contacted, information to be effectively and accurately gathered, and for results to be reviewed by the ERC before submission.
- Quarterly meetings should be organized so that MoES/ERCs can share information and update each other on success/failures/best practices. If these types of meeting are deemed too

resource intensive, then the Ministry should develop an alternative method of achieving this kind of information sharing such as regional meetings or online collaboration.

7. *Empower ERCs with increased decision making.* Before ERCs' new roles and functions are put into practice, the MoES must train ERCs accordingly. After a fixed period of time (possibly one year), it is recommended to review ERC implementation of new roles and functions and determine whether ERCs are ready for empowerment and delegation of targeted decision making power, more delegation of targeted functions, or need more time to adapt. Similar decisions should be based on permanent monitoring and evaluation of the ERC performance. Reasonable power delegation will lead to the creation of a strong accountability system in Georgia only if it is paired with proper training and monitoring.

The delegating of targeted decision making to ERCs can take many forms. Below, we describe three possible scenarios in which local decision making power (delegated from the center) can be exercised.

- *Current ERC configuration.* As ERC are currently configured, the Ministry could easily delegate certain decision making authority to them. This delegation need not be fully autonomous. ERCs could be asked to make decisions within a framework so that the Ministry knew that certain guidelines and parameters were in place to ensure the appropriate use of authority.
- *Regional ERCs.* The MoES may create a Regional (“uber”) ERCs and delegate more decision making power to that body (rather than giving the same rights and responsibilities to all ERCs). Regional ERC would be responsible for managing other ERCs in the same region (for example in Guria, where there are 3 ERCs, Ozurgeti ERC would become Regional uber ERC and oversee the Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri ERC performance). There are two reasons why MoES would benefit from this model. First, it is efficient in terms of management and communications, as the MoES wouldn't deal with the 69 ERCs but instead only 11. Second, the MoES will have more time to work on policy and standards as it won't need to be involved in school/ERC everyday activities (as regional ERCs are responsible for this). Regional ERCs could also play a stronger role in reviewing school level disputes that require mediation and serve as a regional base for school facility assessment work being implemented by Education and Science Infrastructure Development Agency (ESIDA). The downside to this model is that it would create another layer of bureaucracy within the education system which could lead to inefficient transmittal of information across four layers instead of three.
- *Triangle Board (ERC/LG/MoES).* The Ministry may consider creating a representative board consisting of an ERC, local government, and MoES representative at the regional level. This would be an alternative model to the regional ERC. Instead of delegating power to 11 ERCs, certain responsibilities could be shared/concentrated in the triangle board. The specific purpose of the board would need to be clearly thought out and given specific tasks to perform to ensure that it does not create an alternative administrative function. The board would meet regularly to discuss issues/problems and also develop strategy for leveraging resources to develop education in the particular region (that they are overseeing). There are number of advantages that triangle board can bring. First, a diverse membership and particularly local government representative on board will result in closer cooperation and a deeper partnership between local government and ERCs. These institutions are already cooperating successfully on the ground, but there more potential. Local government can increase public involvement in school management/decision making by discussing education issues at local public hearings. Second, shared power and decision making may be less corrupt and less subjective. Third, the MoES might prefer to have their representative involved in the council to be fully informed and updated on developments at the local level. It may be the easiest and less painful way of delegating the power to the local level (while at the same time staying somewhat involved). Finally, bringing three different parties together may generate very broad discussions that will

result in interesting projects. As mentioned with the regional ERC idea, a triangle board will likely create a separate layer of bureaucracy that could cause administrative problems.

It is strongly suggested that the above ideas for delegating decision making be debated in the public sphere to help flush out problems and concerns that each step could create. While there are significant positive aspects of all three, they also come with possible negative consequences that should be addressed. In addition, delegating decision making at the local level and giving new roles and responsibilities to ERCs will not be successful without policy and management changes at the central level. No matter which alternative the MoES will choose, it still has to support ongoing policies.

CONCLUSION

Current research shows that the current implementation of ERC policy and legislation is not achieving the gains that MoES, ERCs, BoTs, or schools desire. The original idea of ERCs serving as a utilitarian resource center that all schools would take advantage of on an as needed basis as not been realized. Additionally, the Ministry has expressed significant concern with the current implementation of the school autonomy model of decentralization. While the market based reforms from the rose revolution have moved education in the right direction, the implementation of those reforms has not been perfect and requires improvement.

This policy paper lays out three alternatives to address the current management issues within the MoES vis-à-vis its decentralization policy and specifically focuses on the role of ERCs as they are currently the Ministry's only resource in the regions. Furthermore, most recommendations closely link with the MoES's current policy and particularly, on overseeing schools financial management by ERCs as well as school report cards. SRCs are very similar to the school branding initiative, but have other vital characteristics that will positively affect education outcomes. This paper recommends that the Ministry strongly consider delegating targeted new functions to ERCs with the goal of increasing accountability within the system, improving accountability structures within the Ministry itself and developing the nascent and largely unrealized local accountability structures envisioned through BoTs. In this recommendation, ERC do not set norms, mandates, standards, or goals, but they monitor their implementation and enable the identification of those stakeholders in need of support in achieving standards and, if necessary, other managing other consequences. They do not determine the data to be gathered for the EMIS and/or performance measures, nor do they perform the analysis of performance (either for the central Ministry or parents through, for example, school reports cards). Instead they play a key role in the gathering of data and information and in the dissemination and understanding of the analysis of performance. ERCs must be trained to do this and to train others to be consumers of this information. They must additionally receive critical training in budgeting and financial management, human resource management, and again train others. ERCs and BoTs are critical pieces in the accountability of the system, therefore, it is imperative they are used as the valuable resource they are.