

Education in Kazakhstan

Context

Kazakhstan has one of the fastest growing economies in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS). A number of economic, social and political reforms have contributed to improving the quality of life in Kazakhstan and to laying the foundation for an education system that aims to keep stride with those of its neighbours in the EU.¹

Kazakhstan has the highest GNP (PPP) per capita in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Its per capita GNP – \$7,120 USD – is almost twice what it was at the start of the decade. Its economic growth was bolstered by high global prices for oil and wheat, which are its two main exports. Consequently its annual percentage GDP growth rose from 9.7% in 2005 to 10.7% in 2006.² Despite its national wealth, the percentage of people living below the poverty line stands at about 35%.³ Additionally, total unemployment rates are around 8%, with youth unemployment almost doubling that at 15%.

Education Reform

In education, many reforms have taken place to improve the status, quality and structure of schooling. Some of the most notable are as follows:

- Total state expenditure on education increased in 2006 to about 3%, which is an improvement over the 2005 allocation of 2.5%. However, this remains among the lowest in the CEE/CIS region and the second lowest in Central Asia after Tajikistan.
- A revised version of the Law on Education was adopted in 2007. The new law aims at developing a competitive education structure and improving national regulatory systems in education.
- As part of the new education legislation, compulsory schooling was increased to 12 years,



vocational training systems were restructured, a three-stage model of higher graduate and post graduate education was established and plans for development of a national system of quality assessment were made.

- The government approved an Integrated National Program on Healthy Life Promotion for 2008-2016, which provides for the expansion of youth friendly services and incorporation of life skills in the secondary school curriculum. The life skills curriculum was piloted and is now ready to be introduced into the national curriculum.
- Indicators were developed to assess the quality of the Child Friendly Schools.
- On September 1, 2008, the government opened 80 new schools and is set to open 245 new schools over the next five years.
- In 2007, the government developed state wide standards for education.

Access

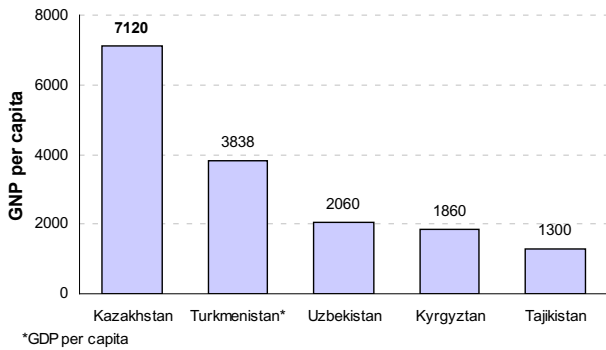
Access to primary and secondary education is high in Kazakhstan. In 2005, the net enrolment rate (NER) was 91% with a net attendance ratio of 98%, as reported by MICS 2006.⁴ In secondary school,

Quick Facts about Education in Kazakhstan

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Central Asia
Total Population	15.3 m	5.3 m	6.5 m	4.8 m	26.5 m	57.9
Youth Unemployment Rate as a % of Total Unemployment	153	155	136.1	150.2	x	
Percentage of GDP spent on Education	3.2	3.7	2.2	x	x	
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment, 2005 (<i>Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Girls/Boys)</i>)	41.9,	10, (1.0)	7, (.93)	x	21	17.8
Net Enrolment in Primary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	91, (.98)	87, (.99)	97, x	x	x	91.67
Net Enrolment in Secondary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	92, (.99)	80, (1.01)	80, (.85)	x	x	84
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	41, (1.25)	43, (1.62)	17, (.35)		15, (.80)	34
Primary Student/Teacher Ratio, 2005	16.4	24	22	x	x	
Out of School Children of Primary School Age (% girls)	9,000 (59%)	24, 000 (48%)	18, 000 (86%)	x	x	51,000
Ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (out of 179 countries)	150	150	150	162	175	x

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008.

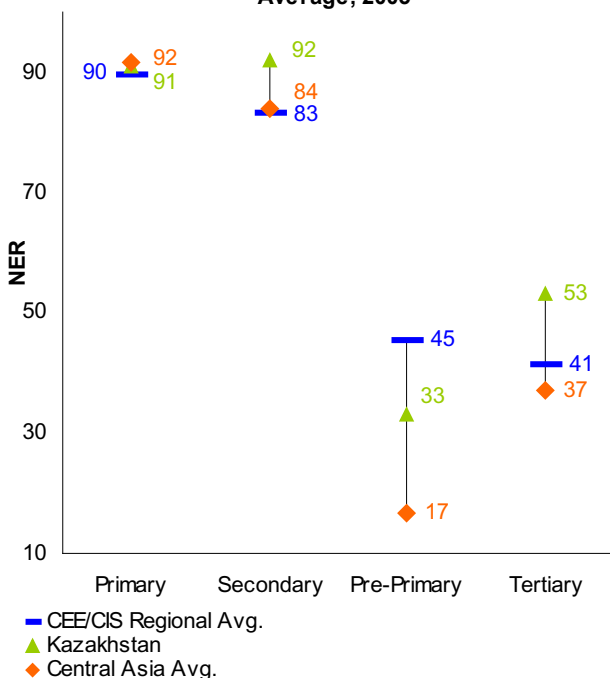
Figure 1: GNP (PPP) per capita (\$USD) in Central Asian countries, 2008



the NER is 92% with a net attendance ratio of 95%, as reported by MICS 2006. About 9,000 children remain out of school,⁵ which is the lowest figure in the region.

Participation in early childhood education is significantly lower. Only 33% of children are enrolled in pre-school, yet this remains above the average for Central Asia. During Soviet times, access to early childhood care and education (ECCE) was high because the government wanted to create incentives for all parents to work. Although during Soviet times, access to ECCE in what are now the Central Asian states was lower than elsewhere in the Soviet Union, it was still fairly widespread. Today more than 95% of the pre-schools in service are state run, indicating that the access to pre-school that exists may well be leftover from the Soviet days. Yet Kazakhstan's low pre-school coverage 'means fewer children have access to school meals, health checks and immunizations

Figure 2: Comparing Education Net Enrolment Rates in Kazakhstan, Central Asia's sub-Regional Average and the CEE/CIS Regional Average, 2005



Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008

during their early years⁶ and that fewer children are 'school-ready' at the start of primary school. Additionally, low pre-school attendance rates increase the risk that children's disabilities and special learning needs will not be identified before starting primary school.

Equity

Parity across genders, regions and income levels in terms of educational access is generally very high in Kazakhstan all the way through secondary school, which echoes the Soviet system. In primary school, there is less than one percentage point difference in attendance ratios between boys and girls, between children living in rural and urban areas and between the highest and lowest income brackets. In secondary school, these trends continue except for children from the lowest income bracket. A small gap appears between children from the richest and the poorest income brackets, with the poorest children being less likely to attend by 2.7 percentage points.

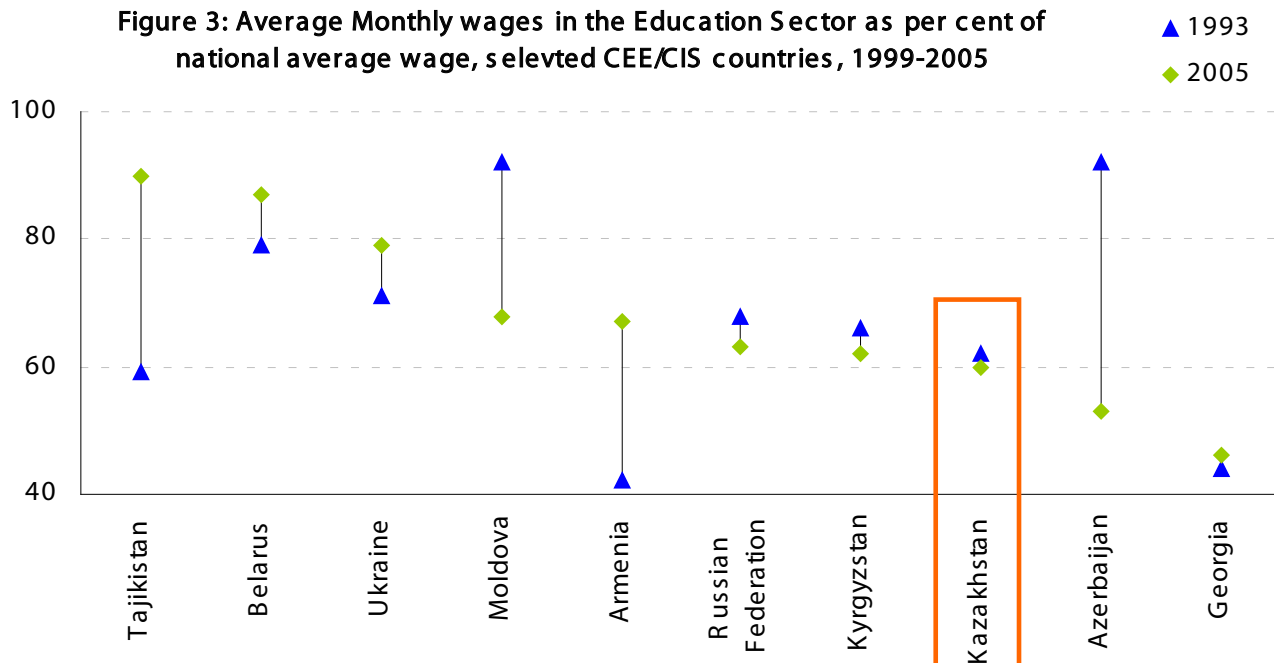


There is serious concern in Kazakhstan about the access to education for children with special needs, whom are estimated to number about 153,000, which is most likely an underestimate. Thus far, children with disabilities have largely not been mainstreamed in the public education system because of varying factors. First, because of low pre-school enrolment rates, many children's special needs go undiagnosed or unnoticed until primary school. Second, there is a severe lack of services to address disabilities before or during schools; there are very few education professionals trained to work with children with disabilities, technology is not available to schools to support children with special needs, and medical services are not available for children with severe developmental problems. Lastly, there are no legislative systems to insist that special needs children be included in the public education system nor are there any regulatory processes to hold the system accountable.

Education Quality

While Kazakhstan has made progress in maintaining a low student-teacher ratio – currently 11:1 – many obstacles still remain with regard to

Figure 3: Average Monthly wages in the Education Sector as per cent of national average wage, selected CEE/CIS countries, 1999-2005



Source: UNICEF. Education for Some More Than Others. 2007.

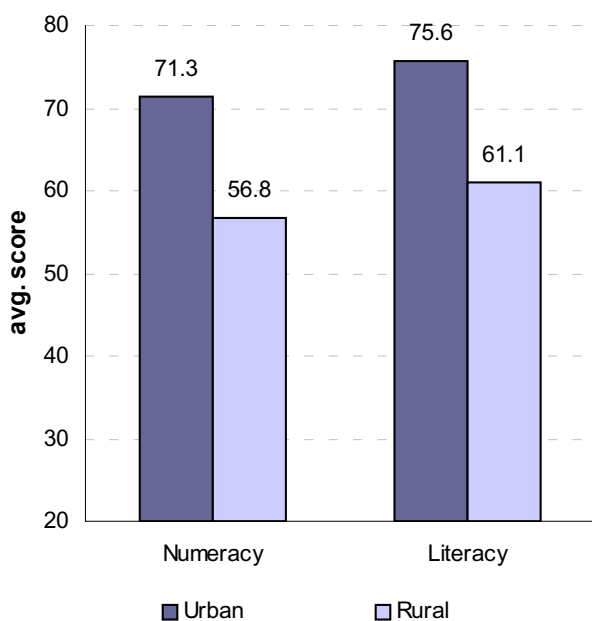
education quality. The major challenges facing Kazakhstan are in the area of learning outcomes and school quality.

Evidence of learning outcomes in Kazakhstan is extremely limited. The Monitoring Learning Assessments (MLA) survey, which was conducted in 2005 with confirmed methodological flaws, is one of the only available measures of the outputs of the country's school system. The results show that about 75% of students show proficiency on the standards set by the assessment in both literacy and mathematics. However, students in rural areas perform significantly worse than students in

urban areas, which reinforces the known problems of poor teacher quality in the rural areas. Furthermore, students attending Russian language schools outperform students attending Kazakh schools. See Figures 3 and 4.

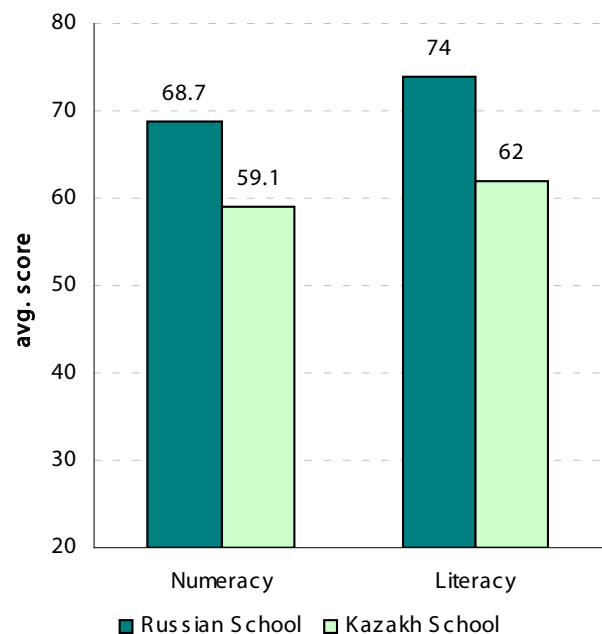
Teachers, who are central to improving learning outcomes, are underpaid and overworked in Kazakhstan. Education sector salaries make up only 60% of the average national wage, which is the third lowest proportion in the region (for countries where data was available) (See Figure 3). Moreover, teachers' salaries, as a proportion of the average national wage, have actually decreased

Figure 4: Learning Outcome Results in numeracy and literacy in Kazakhstan, by location, 2005



Source: MLA 2005.

Figure 5: Learning Outcome Results in numeracy and literacy in Kazakhstan, by school type, 2005



Source: MLA 2005.

since 1993, when education sector wages were about 63%. With increasingly poor working conditions, little in-service support and salaries that are declining in value, teachers have little incentive to invest themselves in improving students' learning outcomes.

The major challenges with regard to quality are as follows:

- There is a shortage of schools in Kazakhstan. Crumbling Soviet school infrastructure due to poor maintenance leaves many schools unusable. Additionally, poor heating and sanitation facilities make still more schools unsafe for classes. The poor state of school infrastructure impedes access to education but also the quality of learning. When the government is spending the bulk of its resources on repairing school buildings, spending on learning materials suffers.
- While compulsory education is free by law, in practice parents and communities often bare a portion of the cost of schooling, through textbooks, supplies, school fees, school meals and, in some cases, school maintenance.
- There is need for a restructuring of the country's monitoring and evaluation system so that concrete information is available on the systems learning outcomes.
- There is a shortage of trained teachers, especially in the remote areas where city-trained teachers are unwilling to work.
- There is a challenge of updating the curriculum and instructional materials, which largely date from the Soviet period.
- There is need to establish a concrete set of uniform standards to maintain accountability and equality across school districts.
- Dropout rates are thought to be on the rise as the national curriculum is increasingly seen as irrelevant to the modern job market, although official numbers are not available.



Education Financing

Kazakhstan spends just over 3% of its total expenditure on education, which is the fifth lowest level in the region. Little information is available about the breakdown of that spending. Kazakhstan's expenditure on education has increased since 2005 after experiencing an extreme drop to almost 2% in the late nineties. However, spending levels are not where they should be considering that Kazakhstan's wealth rivals governments in Central Europe, which spend about twice the amount on education.

Education Priorities

The following are priorities for educational improvement in Kazakhstan:

- Increase the percentage of GDP spent on education;
- Increase teachers' salaries to at least match the average national wage;
- Increase access to ECCE, especially for students from vulnerable families and in rural areas;
- Develop a new and inclusive national curriculum that provides for the implementation of a comprehensive strategy for the inclusion of special needs children;
- Increase access to ECCE and primary school for children with special needs.
- Attract new young education specialists to careers in the MoE to fill a widening human resource gap; and
- Monitor the standardization of schools and enforce compliance of national standards across all school types, especially in rural areas.

- 1 UNICEF Kazakhstan Annual Report 2007.
- 2 World Bank Statistics Online. 2008.
- 3 UNDP Human Development Index Online.
- 4 EFA GMR 2008 and MICS 2008 Kazakhstan.
- 5 EFA GMR 2008.
- 6 UNICEF. Education for Some more than Others. 2008.