

Setting minimum standards in the frame of outcomes' indicators : methods, interest and use.

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In France, an in-depth reform of the public finances management became fully effective in 2007. Goals of performance have been fixed for each administration's field and outcomes' indicators will be used in order to assess the efficiency of the public policies. In this new public budget framework, the education field has not been forgotten. One of the outcomes' indicators that has been chosen is the proportion of pupils who acquired the basic competencies in French and mathematics at the end of primary school and at the end of lower secondary school.

An appropriate programme of assessment has been drawn up in order to establish the minimum standards, to measure their attainment by pupils and to follow the results' evolution year after year. Indicators go along with "targets" fixed by authorities, that is to say assessed objectives that should be reached the following year (i.e. benchmarks).

Being inspired by different methods proposed by the literature on this matter, the setting of minimum standards have been subjected to a specific process that brought together policy-makers, teachers, specialists of students' assessment and statisticians. Original in France, this process consisted in the comparison between teachers' judgements (level of requirement) and the students' performance observed through a broad experimentation of the tests. This objective comparison gives its legitimacy to the setting of minimum standards. But furthermore, this process have also enlightened education officials and teachers, through the gap that might appear between their expectations and the students' results, as well as through the methodological issues they have to be aware of.