The CERCA School Report Card:

Communities Creating Education Quality

Implementation Manual

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Introduction

This manual provides a step-by-step methodology for promoting community participation in improving learning in local schools. The CERCA School Report Card (SRC) approach empowers local school communities to gather information on the quality and conditions of teaching and learning in their schools. They can use this information to guide decisions about appropriate community-level actions to improve educational service delivery. To create a SRC, teachers, parents, and students work together entirely within local communities to collect, analyze, and act upon the information they collect about their schools. Community participation is voluntary. No external incentives are offered to communities other than limited technical assistance in organizing SRC activities.

The SRC was piloted in 42 communities in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, with the following results:

- There was increased community-member involvement in the allocation of local resources to improving educational quality.

- Students, teachers, and community members learned how to document, analyze, and report information on conditions of teaching and learning in their schools.

- Adults and students were mobilized to work together on school improvement plans that have specific, measurable results.

- Tangible outcomes of improved educational quality were observed in local communities.

How to Use the Manual

This manual details procedures for implementing each step of the SRC approach. Sections are organized in the chronological sequence found to be successful during pilot implementation. The first sections describe potential users of the SRC approach, spell out its structure, and outline the time it requires. The next sections outline four steps required in preparing to implement the SRC: selecting schools, recruiting facilitators, training them, and gaining commitments from local schools and communities. The remaining sections describe the five steps of SRC implementation: forming the analysis group, collecting data and analyzing

information, sharing findings with communities, creating action plans and monitoring results, and preparing school improvement plans.

> **The manual is designed for general audiences who are interested in detailed information about SRC implementation and want to assess whether the approach is appropriate for them.**

This manual is not a "how-to" guide. The pilot demonstrated that each SRC is unique, since each participating school has its own reality, priorities, and particular way of expressing needs and sharing them with its community. Instead, the manual is designed for general audiences who are interested in detailed information about SRC implementation and want to assess whether the approach is appropriate for them.

Illustrative examples drawn from the SRC pilot are provided, including training schedules, facilitator exercises, and action plans. Descriptions of community experiences are offered to promote understanding of the process and help users design their own SRC initiatives. Key points that summarize sections or provide complementary information are also presented. A sister document, *The CERCA School Report Card: Communities Creating Education Quality (2006)*, explains the background of SRCs in developing countries and offers comparative information on school-level implementation results. [1]

Who Can Benefit from the School Report Card Approach

The SRC approach can be used by ministries of education, donor agencies, private-sector educational centers, and nongovernmental organizations engaged in initiatives to improve educational quality and/or decentralize control of schools to local communities. Specifically, the approach can contribute to programs whose objectives include:

- parent participation in student learning

- teacher self-improvement efforts

- student participation through peer tutoring and after-school programs

- school-improvement planning that uses data-based and sound management procedures

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[1] CERCA, *The CERCA School Report Card: Communities Creating Education Quality* (Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development, 2006).

How to Implement the CERCA School Report Card

The SRC relies on the use of facilitators to help local communities make informed decisions on improving their schools. Much of the work is done by the analysis group (AG), a small team of individuals who represent local parents, teachers, and students. SRC preparation takes several months, and implementation requires between six weeks to three months, depending on how many two- to three-hour sessions are needed. The number of sessions—generally between 10 and 15—depends on the complexity of data collection strategies chosen.

The selection and training of facilitators is of critical importance to the success of a SRC. They may be school directors, ministry outreach personnel in supervisory positions, or community promoters hired by the implementing organization to develop the SRC in local communities.

The two phases of the SRC—preparation and implementation—entail nine steps in total.

Phase I. Getting Started:

1. Selecting schools (several meetings with ministry officials over 1–2 months)
2. Selecting facilitators (1 month)
3. Training facilitators (3–4 days)
4. Gaining community commitment (2 weeks, 1–2 visits to each school)

Phase II. Implementing the CERCA School Report Card:

1. Forming the analysis group (1–2 sessions over 1–2 weeks)
2. Collecting data and analyzing information (8–10 sessions over 1–2 months)
3. Sharing findings with the community (1–3 sessions over 2 weeks)
4. Creating action plans and monitoring results (1–3 sessions over 1–2 weeks)
5. Preparing school improvement plans (1 session over 1 week)

I. Getting Started

1. Selecting Schools

Key Points #1: Getting Started with the School Report Card

- Select schools based on criteria that are consistent with the education provider's reform initiatives.
- Choose a sufficient number of schools to replace those that decide not to participate.
- Select facilitators who have experience promoting participation in local communities. This is the most important trait of a successful facilitator. Familiarity with primary school classrooms and data collection are also important.
- When training facilitators, simulate actual facilitation situations.

The SRC team leader meets with ministry of education authorities or those of another education service provider to discuss the SRC's objectives and processes. If interest is expressed, criteria for school selection are determined. These generally relate to the service providers' initiatives, which may focus on addressing poverty, poor regional academic or other student performance indicators, or lack of regional participation in reform efforts. In addition, schools may be selected because they are beginning planning activities and could take advantage of data generated by the SRC.

A liaison or implementing division within the ministry of education is then selected, usually the one responsible for assuring educational quality through school outreach, such as the office of supervision.

A number of schools are selected as candidates for participation. As participation is voluntary, this number should be approximately 10 percent greater than the number of schools targeted for implementation. Once schools are identified, school directors are contacted.

2. Selecting Facilitators

Facilitators are members of the implementing organization: they may on a supervisory team of a ministry of education or employees of a non-governmental organization commissioned by a ministry to implement the SRC.

They are identified and recruited through formal advertisements in the media and through informal contacts with specialists in community participation. Those selected should have extensive experience working with different age groups and eliciting group involvement through participatory techniques. They should also be familiar with primary schools and classrooms. Previous teaching experience is

an advantage in the facilitation process, and experience in data collection and analysis is also important.

Final candidates are asked to analyze a problem based on an actual field situation and discuss facilitation strategies that lead to its successful resolution. The ability to place oneself in a situation and personalize steps to a solution constitutes a good indicator of success as an SRC facilitator.

3. Training Facilitators

The main objective of training is to ensure that facilitators understand the SRC approach. Facilitators may be former educators who lack experience with community facilitation, or they may be community promoters who are unfamiliar with concepts of educational quality. Thus, facilitator training focuses on developing techniques for promoting the free exchange of ideas and knowledge among all SRC participants and building an understanding of educational quality.

Training is designed as a three- or four-day workshop that centers on the different stages of the SRC process. If there are time constraints, a series of one-day workshops can be substituted. The workshops are supported by a facilitator field manual, which reviews techniques learned during training. Example 1 is an illustration of a training schedule and its basic content.

Example 1: Illustrative SRC Facilitator Training Schedule

Day	Morning	Afternoon
1	Introductions and purpose of SRC Expectations of trainees Overview: strategies for facilitating community participation Practice exercise	Building community commitment • role of the facilitator • selection of analysis group Analysis group Overview: data collection guide Exercises
2	Data collection guide educational quality coverage Analysis of classroom videos	Data collection guide • school identification • services and resources Data collection instruments • maps • observations • surveys
3	Data analysis • reduction (coding and categorization) and interpretation • setting priorities • developing an action plan	Presenting findings Implementing and monitoring actions

As training uses simulations of the kind of facilitation required, groups of trainees should be limited to 25, with a minimum of two trainers. These numbers ensure that all participants have the opportunity to practice acquired skills. Videos, prototype instruments, trainee exercises, and field manuals are the basic materials used in training. Trainees learn the objectives of the SRC, and they practice facilitation through simulations with peers. They critically analyze videos that show classroom and community learning contexts to develop their understanding of issues of educational quality. Peer communication is encouraged; participants share and build upon their previous field experiences and knowledge. Example 2 presents a simulation exercise offered during facilitator training.

Example 2: Facilitator Training Exercise: Simulation of a Field Situation

La Concordia School carried out the SRC. The school has a community council that receives funds from the ministry to carry out the school's administrative functions, including the hiring and firing of teachers. The school has 150 students from preschool to sixth grade.

Provide trainees with time to read the case study and take notes, based on the case and questions provided. Lead a discussion on the facilitation employed and the school's situation.

QUESTIONS:

- What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the school?
- What problems do you foresee in carrying out the SRC?
- If you have been a facilitator, what would you have done during that session to address the problems detected?

When the facilitator visited the school to discuss the SRC, the director said everyone was very busy, but she believed the process would benefit the school. The facilitator was to coordinate meetings with community members, teachers, and students so they could learn about the objectives of the SRC. At the initial meeting, mothers of students came, but only two fathers. Everyone seemed interested until it came time to choose analysis group members. No one volunteered. When the director asked several mothers directly if they would participate, all said yes. The community leader was also named, although he was not present. It turned out that the director had already selected the AG participants.

Three mothers, two students, the director, and the teacher she had selected came to the first meeting of the AG. The community leader arrived late and drunk. The meeting was intended to inform and train the group on the SRC's objectives and group work procedures to be used. Though this was accomplished, the community leader continually interrupted to state his worries about education in the country and reference to all the help he had given the school over the years. When the meeting was over, the facilitator tried to arrange the next meeting, but the director said they could not meet for two weeks because of civic activities in the school.

Instructional techniques used for facilitator training include the following:

- group discussion in a seminar format to answer questions about facilitation and other concerns arising from experiences during training

- simulation and role-playing of facilitation activities

- the use of videotaping to practice skills

- independent study of materials related to the SRC program and the methodology being used

4. Gaining Community Commitment

Facilitators are responsible for inviting schools to participate voluntarily in the development of the SRC. Once schools are identified, the first point of contact is the school director, who helps the facilitator identify any other individuals or school councils that have decisionmaking responsibilities.

Key Points #2: Discuss Issues with School and Community Members in Commitment Meetings

- The SRC is carried out in collaboration with the ministry of education.
- The SRC helps students, teachers, and parents to improve education.
- Everyone learns about the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- Participation is voluntary.
- The school receives no incentives except for help from the facilitator.
- Students, teachers, and parents select their own representatives to participate.
- What is learned is shared with the whole community.
- All participants plan actions together that aim to make the school better.

The facilitator communicates by telephone with school authorities to determine interest in participation in the SRC, and then meets with them in person. Most often, the meetings take place at the school. The facilitator can also take advantage of meetings that bring together authorities for another purpose—such as district or regional meetings of school directors—to explain the SRC process. Facilitators explain the SRC's purpose and make clear that the school will receive no any incentives for participating except for facilitator visits to support the process. The incentive for carrying out the SRC is to learn the status of one's school.

After these contacts are made, a school visit is scheduled, and the school authorities commit to bringing students, parents, and teachers together to learn about the SRC process. If there is agreement to participate, the facilitator establishes at this time a schedule of AG activities.

II. Implementing the CERCA School Report Card

1. Forming the Analysis Group

The AG is charged with coordinating, guiding, and developing the different stages of the SRC. The AG has student, teacher, and parent members who are chosen by their peer groups in democratic elections, and a community leader is usually invited to join. However, other strategies for selecting AG members may be appropriate for a local community, including choosing students from the student government or on the basis of academic performance, inviting members of a school management committee to join, and asking teachers and other groups to volunteer.

Whenever possible, the AG should have the same number of representatives from each peer group to encourage the participation of all types of members. Six members, two from each peer group, is generally the minimum size, and 16 members should be the maximum. Larger groups make analyses unwieldy and limit participation of all group members.

> **Key Points #3: Facilitating the Analysis Group**
>
> ◆ Ensure that all AG members participate.
> ◆ Use the information guide as a tool for discussion and to expand indicators.
> ◆ Focus on educational quality and how other indicators contribute to quality.
> ◆ Develop simple data collection strategies with the group, using counts, school attendance checklists, and yes/no questions.
> ◆ Prioritize results in terms of issues the community can address that can improve student learning.

At the initial AG session, the facilitator explains the objectives of the SRC. The facilitation strategy selected may determine how the discussion proceeds. Two such strategies have been tested: 1) an external facilitator coordinates the AG's work, and 2) the school director serves as the facilitator, with assistance from the external facilitator. In either case, the initial steps are to explain the AG's role and establish its work procedures. Example 3 presents a simple one-page guide for directors to use in organizing this initial AG session.

Example 3: Director's Guide for Initial Analysis Group Session

The idea of this project is to do something to help us—teachers, fathers, mothers, and students—to continue to improve education, the school, and the school council. This approach was implemented in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. Our school is one of the few in this country that has been invited to participate.

This is an example for directors to use in organizing this initial AG session. The initial session should also discuss the time requirements of 10–15 sessions that each last two to three hours.

To do this, we need to involve representatives of parents, teachers, and students. As director/council leader, I will coordinate the process. The external facilitator will be my assistant in everything—that is his/her job, to help us with the process.

We will create an analysis group that speaks for teachers, students, fathers and mothers, and other people who help the school. Everything will be coordinated by you or by people you and the group delegate.

We will be very honest with ourselves; we will recognize our weaknesses, appreciate our strengths, and project ourselves into the future.

Some outside observers will participate, who are helping in the overall process. They won't judge or criticize us, but they also won't help us solve the problems we find in our school.

Everything that is said in the meetings—for example what students say—is helpful. No one should be punished for what they say, and everything every participant says is important.

- We will all look for information that answers questions about the school.
- We will analyze the information that we collect.
- We will share our findings with all parents, teachers, and students.
- We will create a simple plan of action in which everyone participates.
- We will share the plan with education authorities so that it becomes our yearly school plan.

We should do this with an interest in seeing, hearing, and knowing how we are we doing here in our school. When we know the answer, we can feel satisfied or we can plan to make things better.

The initial AG session should also discuss the time requirements for 10–15 sessions that each last two to three hours. The group should decide on a strategy for holding meetings at times when students and teachers in the group are out of class. A meeting schedule should then be created.

The facilitator then asks the group to make decisions on the structure of the sessions, and they select a moderator and a note-taker. Example 4 shows exercises that a facilitator can use to build participation and teamwork.

Example 4: Exercises to Build Teamwork

Exercise 1: Reflection on Participation

Write the following questions and statements on the blackboard. Ask a member of the group to read the question and the statements, then read the questions for reflection. Ask for a volunteer to write participant responses on the board. Stress the importance of all group members' answers, and ask individuals who have not responded for their opinions.

Why is community participation important to the task of improving the quality of education?

- It involves everyone in young people's learning.
- It helps teachers in the classroom.
- It can increase the time students spend studying.
- It encourages families to become more committed to the education of their children.
- It opens doors to doing communal projects.

Let's Reflect

- What are the strengths of the community, in terms of participation?
- What difficulties in the community may be preventing active participation?

Develop conclusions that relate to work on the SRC. It is important to emphasize two conclusions: 1) all opinions are important in the SRC process, and 2) we all know different things about the school and the community.

Exercise 2: Building a Tower

Organize participants in three groups, each with at least one teacher, one student, and one parent. Give each group newsprint and masking tape. Using only these elements, each group must build a tower within five minutes. The biggest and strongest tower is the winner. Ask participants to judge the winning tower. After the exercise, ask the following questions:

- Did all group members participate actively in building the tower? Why or why not?
- Was everyone's opinion considered?
- Who participated most and why?
- Why is it important to work as a group?

Key Points #4: Initiating the Analysis Group Process

- ◆ Present the purpose of the SRC in a simple manner.
- ◆ Make sure that the AG has balanced representation and includes all sectors of the education community.
- ◆ Use examples that encourage the community to unite and work together to change a situation.
- ◆ Emphasize the importance of working as a team and present exercises that build teamwork (see Example 4).
- ◆ Explain to the group that they should listen to each other and ensure that all group members participate.
- ◆ Allow the group to determine the methodology for the sessions. Ask if they want someone to be the moderator, and let them decide if there will be a note-taker and the amount of time allowed for comments.
- ◆ Come to an agreement with the group about the timing and agenda for each session, keeping in mind each step of the SRC process.
- ◆ Remind all participants that the group's objectives should be in keeping with local realities, but no one should judge whether they are appropriate. Explain that information shared will not result in any type of sanction it will be used only by the school and its community.
- ◆ Whenever possible, sessions should be held outside of class periods so as to avoid interfering with the learning of participating students.
- ◆ Emphasize the role of the AG as "insiders" whose knowledge of the workings of the school and community is key to improving the school.

2. Collecting Data and Analyzing Information

The facilitator presents the SRC information guide to the group and discusses each area briefly, ensuring that the indicators related to the four main categories of the guide are generally understood. These are: 1) the general characteristics of the school; 2) its access to services and resources; 3) processes, such as attendance, planning, and parent participation; and 4) results, such as coverage, efficiency, and quality of teaching and learning. (See Annex A for the complete information guide). New indicators identified by group members can be added.

Indicators are aspects of community, school, and classroom behaviors that can be easily observed or learned about through simple "yes/no" questions. The relationship of the indicators to student learning always forms part of the discussion of data collection strategies. Key Points #4 summarizes main concepts of the SRC information guide.

Key Points #5: Main Concepts Underlying of SRC Indicators

Educational Quality
The SRC's priority is educational quality—that is, that students gain within the prescribed amount of time the knowledge and skills that their countries have determined are needed to be productive and participatory citizens. Educational quality is generally measured in terms of student academic performance. The most common measure is the grades that teachers give students in their daily evaluations. Many countries also use standardized tests to measure student performance. A third way to measure performance is through a student's production in the classroom. The SRC uses each or all of these measures, depending on what is available at the school. However, the AG generally emphasizes student production in the classroom and daily evaluations of teachers, as this information can be gathered by the AG during their classroom observations.

Learning Contexts and Processes
This aspect of educational quality includes the strategies teachers use to ensure that students interact with subject matter in ways that promote learning. This means that students participate in a variety of activities that offer opportunities to learn new abilities, information, and concepts, and do so through investigation, modeling, and practice. Activities include working together on projects in small groups, investigation and discovery with materials within and outside of the classroom, peer teaching, and the use of self-learning guides in large group and individual work contexts.

Democratic Behaviors
Students learn to respect others and work as a team, important skills in today's competitive global society. Learning to participate in school can contribute to the formation of reflective and critical-thinking citizens who can make decisions and participate fully in a democratic society. School experiences help to create responsible citizens, especially those in cooperative group work, participation in peer group elections, service in student governments, and the evaluation of results.

Parent Participation
Parents contribute to educational quality by stimulating their children to learn. Parents can ensure that students attend classes regularly and arrive on time, and they can participate in the learning process by helping with homework and visiting or assisting in classrooms. Similarly, parents can take play an active role in diagnosing the needs of the school and developing school operations plans that permit their children's knowledge and skills to improve.

Educational Efficiency
Education quality ensures that all students learn a country's requirements for good citizenship within prescribed amount of time, instead of repeating grades or dropping out. Indicators of efficiency include repetition and dropout rates, teacher-student ratios, the number of days classes are held, and the attendance and punctuality of teachers and students

Each AG session is conducted like a miniworkshop, and a limited number of indicators are discussed. Decisions are made about the data collection strategies that will be used to examine the status of indicators, along with decisions about persons responsible and reporting procedures. Often the AG visits a classroom or some other area of the school to observe before returning to the session to decide

on data collection. They may also develop hypotheses about the status of certain indicators.

Several members of the AG work on each data collection task. When agreement is reached on procedures for examining an indicator, responsible members carry out the investigation prior to the next meeting. At that time, they report to the entire AG. Techniques for data collection generally include counts, inventories, simple observational checklists, and surveys of students that use yes/no responses. Example 5 describes the common data collection tools used in the SRC.

Example 5: Common School Report Card Data Collection Tools

Maps. Visual representations (maps, drawings, and diagrams) help to reveal important characteristics and tendencies in the classroom, school, and community. Two types of maps can help the AG's work:

> **Data collection tools:**
>
> - **Maps**
> - **Observation**
> - **Survey and interviews**

- maps that show important characteristics of a community, including potential allies for the school and threats to it
- maps that illustrate the spatial arrangement in a classroom of students, teachers, and materials

Observation. Data gathered through observation for the SRC are usually entered on checklists and inventories.

- Inventories are counts of certain types of objects or conditions present in a classroom or school. Inventories are useful tools in determinations of the availability of instructional materials. They can also be used when collecting information on physical conditions or the number of children or teachers in a school or classroom. Inventories are used to answer questions about the availability of supplies or facilities, such as: Are latrines or bathrooms available for both boys and girls? What is the ratio of books to children? What is the ratio of pencils to children?
- Checklists are observational tools used in measuring the presence or absence of an event or action. They are different from inventories in that their focus is something that must "happen" in a classroom but does not always occur. Checklists help provide a general profile of the school, and are used to record answers to the following types of questions: Are students organized into small groups? Do teachers use praise? Are girls called on?

Surveys and interviews. Surveys and interviews use various types of questions, but surveys are often characterized by fixed-choice responses and interviews by open-ended questions.

- Fixed-choice responses are used to collect data on the interpretation of events or the personal characteristics of students and teachers. Investigators usually limit the number of responses possible. The yes/no question is the most common fixed-choice type of question. Whether parents help with homework is an issue that is often of interest in a SRC. An AG can get answers to this question if one of its members goes to each classroom and asks students to raise their hands if their father or mother helps with homework.
- Open-ended questions offer teachers and students an opportunity to provide interpretations of events or situations, and they can give explanations or develop answers in their own words. One example is a question that collects information about the strategies teachers use when they correct errors. The question might be posed, "Many teachers worry about what to say to a student when a mistake is made. What do you do? Why?" Categories of responses need to be established for this type of question, based on information interviewees provide.

Findings are presented in terms of presence or absence, descriptive accounts, or numerical counts. AG members analyze findings and decide whether these are acceptable or need improvement. This analysis is done for each indicator.

The AG studies the findings and prioritizes information, with particular attention to weaknesses the community could address in ways that would improve learning. Example 6 illustrates the use of SRC data to promote accountability in a rural school in El Salvador.

Example 6: School Report Card and Accountability in El Salvador

> The AG met to discuss the results of a survey of students that tried to determine if parents participate in their learning. On presenting the results, a father said, "I don't understand! The director said there were 32 students in sixth grade. However, when I went to the classroom and asked the students to raise their hands if they were helped by their parents, there were only 28 students in the class. I asked if any were absent, and they said no. The teacher confirmed that all students were present. Colleagues, we need to know the real numbers, and we have to tell the truth to the parents in this community. Can someone explain? I don't understand."
>
> A teacher in the group explained that enrollment statistics are kept high to maintain a certain level of human, physical, and financial resources.
>
> A mother responded "But it shouldn't be like that; you should state the real enrollment!"
>
> "Yes!" said the father who presented the case. "We have to wait until the next meeting and have the director explain. Then we have to reach a solution as a group. We can't have bad data; we need to adjust them. If not, why does this group exist?" The meeting ended with everyone in agreement on this point.
>
> At the next meeting, the group organized itself by grades to examine statistics the director presented monthly to the departmental education office and teachers' grade records. The group also visited classrooms, counted students, and asked who was absent. Finally, the whole group met, compared their findings, and corrected data. The director agreed with the corrections and admitted that she did not have her books up to date.

3. Sharing Findings with the Community

The dialogue with the community is the actual SRC. The dialogue stage is designed to ensure ownership of the SRC by the broader school community. In a school assembly, the community discusses the SRC findings. This discussion, facilitated by the AG, allows the community to make decisions and move toward actions that help improve the quality of education.

The last few AG sessions are used to develop the content and logistics for community dialogue presentations. Roles are assigned, often on a small-group basis, and AG members carry out their assignments: planning data presentations, organizing a snack for participants, or obtaining loudspeakers or other audio equipment.

Presentations generally last two to three hours, and cover findings and an action plan for each area investigated during the SRC process. A social period with refreshments follows. Community dialogues are seen as social events and often attract several hundred community members. The presentation of findings is followed by questions, answers, and comments, and participants often suggest additional action plans. As shown in example 7, dialogues generally end with the assembly being invited to participate in the work of the action plan.

Key Points #6: Facilitating the School Report Card Community Dialogue

- The facilitator's role should be minimal during the community dialogue. It is a community event, and the AG and community members are the main actors; they develop the presentations and organize logistics.

- Facilitators can be helpful in assisting parents, teachers, and students to effectively report their findings through the use of drawings, diagrams, and dramatizations.

- The community dialogue generally attracts a large number of participants—often over 300. Organizing an event for this number is often a logistical challenge for the AG. The facilitator can help by designing the invitations for the community and educational authorities and developing the overall plan for the event.

- It is very important to collect the community members' impressions of findings and their ideas for solutions to problems presented. The facilitator can help develop a poster that presents priorities chosen and possible solutions to problems. Responses from the community should be added to this poster during the presentation.

- Broad participation of the community is key to implementing changes that improve educational quality. Thus, community ideas should be incorporated into this session, and community members should be given the opportunity to participate in an expanded group. This may continue to be called the analysis group, the support group, or the action group, depending on the community's wishes.

- Once the community has identified problems, the next step is to decide on actions that can be taken to improve educational quality in the school. The community thus develops an action plan that reflects decisions taken at the meeting. The plan orients work to be undertaken to overcome problems relating to educational quality that were detected by the AG.

Example 7: Presentation of a School Report Card to the Community in Nicaragua

> Maria is the mother of a fifth-grade girl at a Nicaraguan rural school. Maria was invited to join the AG because she had always helped the school by preparing the snack for students in her daughter's class,.
>
> At first, she did not participate in discussions and seemed to think the meetings were a waste of time. However, as she visited classrooms, saw how much the teachers had to do, and reviewed statistics on absences, she began to make suggestions. During the planning for the community dialogue, Maria offered to present the findings on student learning. Since she had never spoken before an audience, she asked fellow AG members to review her presentation and recommend improvements. At the community dialogue, Maria was confident. She explained that she had been unsure of herself before her participation in the SRC. She raised important issues: the lack of attention given to incomplete homework assignments, the absences and tardiness of many students, and the low grades of a large percentage of students. She described many ways that parents could help the school, including visiting classes and helping teachers with materials, monitoring student attendance, and assisting in the organization of vacation classes for students behind in their studies. Maria ended her presentation by saying, "I invite everyone those who are present at this meeting to help solve the school's problems."

Key Points #7: Preparing the School Report Card Action Plan

- Establish procedures for teamwork with the expanded AG.
- Prioritize issues in terms of group perceptions of needs and potential actions.
- Create a monitoring plan that includes activity, objective, actions, timeline, resources, and personnel.
- Develop a simple monitoring plan with dates for assessing progress toward objectives.
- Reflect on progress with the group and make new decisions as needed.

4. Creating Action Plans and Monitoring Results

The SRC attempts to build broad community participation in decisions about local schooling and actions to improve schooling. Improvement relies on measuring the results of actions undertaken. The process begins with the AG meeting that incorporates suggestions from the community dialogue into the action plan.

The AG then holds a meeting to involve a broader group of community members in developing action plans, carrying out actions, monitoring results, and making new decisions based on the results of the actions. The role of the facilitator is to help the participants think through actions that are possible with the resources that are available and develop strategies to measure the results of these efforts.

The action plan is the concrete organization of activities and actions to resolve obstacles to improved learning in the school.

The input for the plan is the AG's information and analysis of results and its sharing of findings with the community. This means that an important part of the facilitator's work in the final sessions is to ensure that the group prioritizes issues arising from discussions. Clear criteria are needed, including what is most necessary; what can be done in the short, medium, and long term; and what can be done by the school, the community, the education ministry, or other parties.

The facilitator should keep in mind that the principal aim of the SRC is to improve educational quality - that should be the focus of activities undertaken. Some communities may decide that the first step to improving educational quality is to ensure a safe, clean environment for learning. If participants want infrastructure changes to be the first priority, this decision should be accepted. Facilitators should then try to help participants identify other medium-term priorities that will affect learning, once infrastructure needs are met. Example 8 presents an exercise used by a facilitator to help the group set priorities. It references the making of tortillas because they are common in El Salvador. Culturally appropriate examples, such as making an apple pie in the United States or empanadas in other parts of Latin America can be substituted.

Example 8: Facilitation Exercise for Creating an Action Plan—Making Tortillas

Step 1: Cut out two sets of newsprint figures: the first in the shape of a ball of tortilla dough and the second in the shape of tortillas. At the AG meeting, give each participant a dough cut-out, and ask them to write down a problem analyzed by the group that could be solved during the current school year.

Draw a plate on the blackboard and ask group members to turn in the problems they identified. On the plate, ask a participant to organize results that are the same. Those appearing most frequently are discussed by the AG and incorporated into the plan, as appropriate.

Step 2: Organize the participants into groups that include students, teachers, and parents and pass out the tortilla cut-out. Say, "We are now going to make a tortilla out of our dough," and give each group one of the selected problems. Ask them to split their tortillas into pieces that answer the following questions 1) Why? (objectives); 2) How? (actions); 3) When? (time); and 4) Who? (persons responsible). Use this information to construct an action plan.

Once activities have been prioritized, their objectives should be developed, along with a determination of what actions are needed for reaching these objectives. The group should also produce a timeline, list resources needed, and identify those responsible for carrying out the actions. This results in the school's action plan, which contains the following elements:

- **Activity:** the solution proposed by the community to overcome an identified obstacle to learning.

- **Objective:** what the school hopes to accomplish by doing the activity; the change envisioned.

- **Actions:** specific, concrete processes that the school undertakes to reach the proposed objective. (For example, the activity of putting trash receptacles in the school entails the following actions: determining the number needed, finding donors, picking up the receptacles, and creating a system for emptying them.)

- **Timeline:** the period of days, weeks, or months needed to complete the planned actions.

- **Resources:** the materials required to carry out the actions.

- **Responsible individuals:** the person or persons who make sure the action is carried out.

Example 9: Details an Action Plan for a School in Guatemala.

Problem Identified	Activity	Actions	Responsible	Time
Failure to complete homework in all grades owing to lack of parental interest	Involve parents in reviewing and ensuring completeness of assigned homework	1. Establish a set time, such as immediately after lunch, for children to do homework	Parents	Daily, from Sept. 8 to mid-Oct. (end of school year)
		2. Create an adequate place within students' homes for school materials to be kept and homework to be accomplished	Parents	Weekend of Sept. 10 and 11
		3. Visit all the homes of students to verify the presence of a work place	Students	Monday, Sept 13
		4. Review homework to verify that teachers marked it as complete.	Parents	Daily, until the end of the school year
		5. Review and stamp homework as acceptable.	Teachers	Daily, until the end of the school year
		6. Give awards to students who complete all homework.	Teachers	Closing ceremony, Oct. 2005

When the action plan is completed, the facilitator assists the group in developing a monitoring plan. The monitoring plan contains expected objectives and measures for determining the results of actions.

Monitoring is the systematic observation of the set of conditions or functions related to the desired results. The SRC monitors actions taken by the AG and other community participants to improve learning in their schools.

Monitoring of actions undertaken at the school level can be very simple. It can include a narrative about the actions planned, actions undertaken, and changes observed by the AG.

Ideally, the monitoring plan is a part of the action plan. It includes a calendar for the implementation of monitoring work, dates by which progress will be measured, and a list of the expected results of the actions and strategies to be used to measure results. Example 10 presents an illustrative segment of a monitoring plan.

Example 10: Illustrative School Report Card Monitoring Plan

Action	Monitor	Time	Objective	Measure	Projected Result
Parents, teachers, and students talk to community members about the importance of students arriving on time in order to learn	Prof. Juan with Sra. María	One month	20 more students arrive at school on time	Comparison of teachers' attendance lists in May and June	At least 15 more students will arrive on time within the month

5. Preparing School Improvement Plans

Many schools have yearly school plans because they are ministry of education requirements, rather than tools for measuring improvement. Generally, such plans are developed by a few teachers, a school director, and perhaps a president of a school council, but they do not involve students or the community at large.

The SRC helps make school plans more relevant by focusing on obstacles to learning that are identified by the community and building community commitment to improving learning through concrete actions. The detail developed in SRCs can help schools produce meaningful school plans.

With the help of the AG or the broader community group formed to carry out the action plan, the school director can use the SRC as a part of the school annual plan. At this stage, the director's leadership is very important in making local authorities aware of the SRC and the work being undertaken in the community to improve the school.

The next step is to classify the activities of the action plan under categories of activities normally found in a school annual plan: organizational, financial, pedagogical, and administrative. Once classified, these activities should be complemented with other activities involving the relationship of the school to the local education district and the ministry of education. Meetings between local authorities and the school working group are held to define these activities.

Sustaining the School Report Card

All schools in the pilot study planned to continue actions in the ensuing school year. Most schools had also created timetables for repeating the SRC process. In some cases, a formal relationship was established between AGs and school administrative councils for regular reporting of results. These actions show a high degree of ownership of the SRC by teachers, students, and parents.

The facilitator can support these ongoing efforts by helping the AG examine the initial findings of their monitoring efforts. Such findings can be used to make decisions on whether to continue actions, begin new actions, or carry out a new SRC to identify new needs. The facilitator can help the group establish a timeline for activities in the ensuing school year.

Annex 1:

Guide for Information Collection

This guide serves as the basis for collecting information. Indicators were tested in the field to determine their value in clearly assessing situations and motivating educational communities. Final information to be presented to the community is modified, based on the application.

CONTEXT

Identification

Name of school
Date
School/community code number
Address, municipality, department, country
Type of school (mark all that apply): rural, urban, multigrade, indigenous, etc.
Grades offered
Number of students (male and female)
Number of teachers
Employment status of teachers
Number of shifts
Grades attended, from preschool to sixth grade
Person(s) responsible for collecting school-level information

Access to Services

Does the school have the following services?
  Potable water
  Sanitation services and functional latrines. If so, how many?
  Electricity
  Sufficient natural light in the classrooms
  A functional recreation area
  Telephone access
  Adequate security
  Recycling processes

INPUT

Access to Resources

How many children have access to the following resources?

Desks
Notebooks and pencils
Crayons, poster boards, and other materials
Recycled materials
Their own textbooks during class
Textbooks to use outside of class
Computers (or other forms of technology such as science laboratories) for learning purposes
A usable library

Access to Social Services

Are the following social services are available in the school for students?

Daily school meals
Vouchers
Scholarships
Health programs
Other (specify)
Which needed services are not available?
Does the school receive some type of nongovernmental assistance? Who contributes, and what kind of help is it?

PROCESSES

Attendance

In total, how many students do not regularly attend school?
In total, how many students do not arrive at school on time?
On how many school days last month were there no classes? List reasons classes were not held.
What is the average number of students per section?

Implementation of the school plan

Does the school rely on an improvement plan for administrative management and instructional practices?
Why should it have a plan?
To what extent is the school plan known and shared with the teachers, and to what extent is it shared with parents?
To what extent have previously established goals of the school plan been achieved?

Parent participation

Is there someone at home who reads to children?

Do parents support and check homework?
Are conditions at home appropriate for doing homework?
Do teachers and parents work together on projects to improve the school?

RESULTS

Coverage

Number of school-age boys (7–15) out of school
Number of school-age girls (7–15) out of school
Number of preschool-age boys and girls out of the school, if preschool is available

Efficiency

How many students are repeating first, second, and third grade this year? Why?
How many students are in first and sixth grade? Why is there a difference?
How many students does each teacher have?

Quality

Do students express their inquiries and ideas during class?
Are students working in small groups?
Do students read children's books and other materials that are not textbooks?
Are specific times devoted to reading during school hours?
Do students write about the topics they care about?
Are there student's exhibitions on the walls?
Are many students writing productions (such as poems, letters, research, and stories)?
Are there math exhibitions made by students (including problem-solving exercises)?
Do students receive formative feedback to correct their mistakes and recognize their success in learning?
Do students receive recognition for their academic progress?
Is there discipline at the classroom?
Are the classroom norms hung on the wall of each classroom?

Civic competencies

Does the school have an active student government?
Does the student government have a diverse member base?
Is student's group work displayed?
Is there formative self-assessment of teachers and student participation in team-building activities?

Annex 2:

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the CERCA School Report Card?

The CERCA School Report Card (SRC) has been developed in Central America as an approach that informs local school communities about conditions of teaching and learning in their schools. The analysis of simple indicators uses self-assessment to enable communities to better understand educational processes and results. Local communities develop action plans and monitor implementation to improve school quality.

Why is the CERCA SRC unique?

The CERCA SRC is unique because it involves teachers, parents, and students working jointly to collect and analyze information and act upon what they find. The SRC is a strategy of empowerment and capacity building in action research, analysis, and planning for local education communities. It is not a top-down approach; rather, it is designed to build quality education through local community consensus and decisionmaking. Thus, this approach can be considered a non-confrontational accountability process that supports ongoing decentralization efforts.

What are the key features of CERCA SRC?

The key features of the CERCA SRC are:
1. A strong focus on educational quality and democratic behavior in the classroom as keys for improving the delivery of local education.
2. A democratically elected analysis group (AG) of 10–15 members, with equal representation of students, teachers, and parents. An AG also includes the school principal and perhaps a community leader, and all members work together over a three-month period, on average.
3. A community facilitator, who, for a limited period of time (2 to 3 hours a day for about 12 days) helps communities to collect and analyze data. The facilitator also helps the AG to prepare and deliver the SRC on school conditions to the broader community and assists with other actions to improve the education experience of students.
4. An emphasis on assisting communities in monitoring the results of their action plans and making new decisions based on the monitoring findings.

What procedures make the CERCA SRC work?

A series of procedures are generally carried out over the course of a school year.

The first step is the selection of members of the analysis group. The AG's student, teacher, and parent members are usually elected democratically by their peers, though communities can determine another selection process. The school principal is also a member of the AG.

The second step involves defining data collection strategies and procedures. AG members decide on approaches for collecting information on the status of the school. This is done through a number of simple indicators that are related to the general characteristics of the school, coverage, efficiency, and the quality of teaching and learning. Additional indicators include access to services and resources and processes such as attendance, planning, and parental participation. The AG studies findings and prioritizes the information by identifying weaknesses that the community can address and that have the most impact on learning.

The third step is to present findings to the community. This step involves the production of the actual SRC. The AG uses a variety of media, including graphics and socio-drama, to present findings at community dialogues. Community members provide input on priorities and action strategies.

The final step is the implementation of action and monitoring plans. The finalization of the action plan is based on community input. It consists of strategies for carrying out actions, identification of individuals responsible for the actions, a timeline, and a monitoring plan with objectives and measures for determining results. The AG often participates in the action planning, as do community members.

Why is an approach like the CERCA SRC important?

Traditionally, parents in Central America have had few options for, and little knowledge about, the education of their children, especially in the absence of standardized tests and school reporting. Due to their scarce economic resources, most parents have very limited capacity to express complaints about their children's schooling and almost no power to influence it. Their powerlessness reflects the weak, top-down, bureaucratic systems that typify government services in the region.

National governments and ministries of education recognize the importance of improving education quality by stimulating local participation. However, the focus thus far has been on local administration of funds. While this process may improve transparency and accountability, it has done little to affect education quality.

Ministries in Central America are looking for ways to involve parents meaningfully in educational aspects of schooling.

Is this the first time that a school report card has been implemented?

No, school report cards have been implemented in more than 10 developing countries and exist in a number of forms in developed countries. The four most successful programs in the developing world have been implemented in Namibia, Brazil, Ghana, and by UNICEF in several countries. However, the CERCA SRC is a new model that was developed using the input of existing school report card methodology. The CERCA SRC took this bottom-up effort further by helping communities develop their own objectives and procedures for collecting and analyzing data, taking actions, and monitoring results. In addition, the CERCA SRC makes students a vital part of the entire process and shares information with the whole community.

What has been the impact of the CERCA SRC in Central America?

The CERCA SRC process generated a great deal of interest in school communities. An average of 306 individuals participated in assemblies—or community dialogues—that were held to discuss SRC findings in all participating schools. In the largest of these schools, over 1,000 people participated in the community dialogue.

The SRC successfully addressed issues of education quality and efficiency:
- 97 percent of the schools with action plans initiated activities to improve education quality during the 2005 school year.
- actions to improve education quality made up 85 percent of all actions taken in SRC schools, compared to 18 percent of actions in schools without the SRC.
- an estimated 77 percent of community members participating in the SRC process could demonstrate an understanding education quality issues as a result of this participation.
- 79 percent of SRC schools initiated actions before the end of the school year, and all of them incorporated the SRC into their school management planning for the ensuing school year.

How long does it take to implement the CERCA SRC?

The SRC process generates results in a relatively short time, generally between six weeks and three months.

What types of actions were carried out as a result of the CERCA SRC?

Actions related to quality included parents establishing an adequate place for their children to do homework and reading with them; students developing norms of conduct for the classroom and serving as tutors for younger children; and teachers studying participatory methods, organizing classrooms into small groups, and training parents as tutors.

Actions related to efficiency included teachers and parents visiting the homes of habitually tardy or absent students, religious leaders discussing the importance of schooling during church meetings, school-age children being identified who were not enrolled in school, and community groups taking action on child labor affecting school attendance.

Is the CERCA SRC cost-effective?

Yes, although comparative data are limited, the CERCA SRC per-beneficiary cost is less than one-half that of other programs in Central America. Per-community costs are one-third less than the costs of a similar program in Ghana.

Is the CERCA SRC sustainable?

The potential for SRC sustainability is high. In the five countries, all participating SRC communities plan to continue implementing actions for school improvement in 2006 without CERCA support.

The SRC process has established a cadre of parents, teachers, and students who have learned to collect and analyze data, as well as develop strategies that use local resources to solve problems and monitor results. This is evident in the number of communities where AGs successfully carried out action plans, despite the fact that facilitators could not reach them for a period of time. That knowledge gained in planning and monitoring was transferred is shown in the demonstrated ability of school personnel to adapt SRC action plans to their 2006 school management plans.
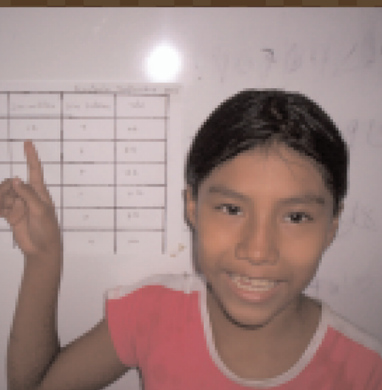
How does the CERCA SRC link to school improvement plans and other current educational policies in participating countries?

The CERCA SRC supports decentralization policies and strategies to encourage local participation in all Central American countries, and it promotes the efficient use of local resources to improve educational quality. The SRC also provides information for effective local school management, and it supports national strategies for partnership between local school leadership and ministry of education supervisory personnel to improve delivery of national and regional services to schools.

Can the CERCA SRC approach be taken to scale?

Yes, the School Report Card has all of the key characteristics for successful scaling up. It is low cost, it can be implemented by existing Ministry personnel, such as supervisors or school principals, it can be continued effectively by communities without external support, and it has a strong focus on results related to accountability for learning and outcomes. The SRC is a valuable tool for those countries involved in initiatives to improve educational quality and/or decentralize control of schools to local communities. Specifically, the SRC can contribute to programs with objectives such as: parent participation in student learning; teacher self-improvement efforts such as teacher circles; student participation through peer tutoring and after school programs; or school improvement planning using data-based management procedures.

Results suggest that scaling up can best be achieved by using a phased strategy that allows new implementing schools to learn from the experience of those who are using the SRC approach. The school outreach division of Ministries, such as supervision, should implement the SRC by training school directors to facilitate the School Report Card approach. Utilization of School Report Card findings by Ministries to plan outreach support to the schools will reinforce ongoing use of the SRC tool and encourage additional schools to implement the approach.