

# **2025 Education Compass: The state of student learning in Botswana**

Students in Botswana are proceeding through school but not meeting grade-level standards



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## Students in Botswana are proceeding through school but not meeting grade-level standards

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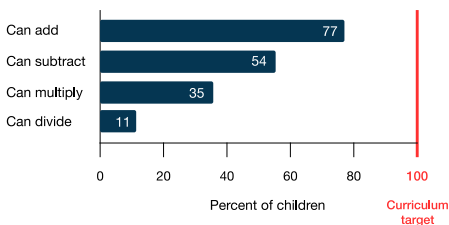
*While ministries of education set grade-level standards for student learning, it is common in sub-Saharan Africa for many students to struggle to meet these goals. This representative study of foundational skills in Botswana found that just 11 percent of standard 4 students met grade-level expectations, with substantial disparities across groups. Caregivers were largely uninformed about their children’s learning levels – fewer than 1 in 4 could accurately assess them. Recommendations include targeted instruction, better informing and coaching caregivers on how to support learning, and regular assessments to address these gaps and improve outcomes.*

In its Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP 2015-2020), Botswana’s then Ministry of Education and Skills Development recognized the dire need to improve learning outcomes, making it one of 11 key strategic priorities. One starting point for improving learning is examining how student skill levels compare with curricular expectations and whether the system is meeting learning goals. Annual data that tracks students’ progress in foundational skills can provide such an evidence base for education policymaking. The inaugural Education Compass survey in Botswana in 2024 assessed children and included interviews with their caregivers. This brief shares some key findings from the survey.

### Finding 1: Nine out of 10 students are performing below grade level


The Education Compass survey focused on foundational numeracy skills—addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division—that per the Botswana curriculum students are expected to master by standard 3. These skills are critical for short- and long-term academic success. Students who do not master the basics in early grades will fall further behind and are likely to struggle later on, including in Botswana’s primary school leaving exam in standard 7. As shown in Figure 1, only 11 percent of standard 4 students have mastered division, while roughly a quarter have not mastered any of the basic operations.

Figure 1: Nine out of 10 students do not meet grade level expectations in maths




### Finding 2: Fewer than one in four caregivers could accurately assess their child’s numeracy level


In addition to carrying out academic assessments with students, the survey team interviewed caregivers, asking if they knew what skills their children had mastered and how they engage in their child’s schooling. As shown in Figure 2, 23 percent




**1984**  
students



**1705**  
families



**60**  
schools



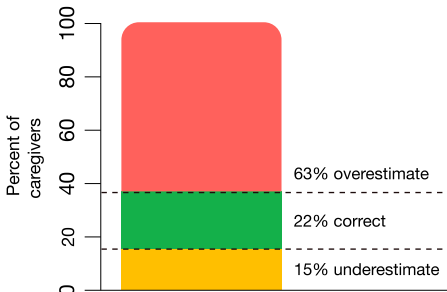
**3**  
regions

**Survey objectives:**

1. Collect data on standard 4 students’ foundational mathematics skills and compare with national standards
2. Inform regional and national discussions about learning progress
3. Learn how to strengthen caregiver knowledge and engagement in their children’s learning

of caregivers accurately assessed whether their child could add, subtract, multiply or divide. Just over 60 percent of caregivers overestimated their child's ability level, and 15 percent underestimated it.

**Figure 2: Fewer than 1 in 4 caregivers could accurately assess their child's numeracy level**



Caregivers of lower-performing children are the least likely to accurately assess their child's ability. About 65 percent of caregivers of children who can divide accurately assess their child's numeracy level; this figure was just 12 percent among caregivers whose children can not yet add.



### **Why might caregivers lack accurate information?**

- 1. Limited connection with homework.** While over 85 percent of children had regular homework and nearly all who had it need daily help with it, over half of caregivers reported they found the content of their child's homework sometimes or always too difficult to assist with it. Caregivers may lack the skills or strategies to assess their child's understanding.
- 2. Limited contact with teachers.** 70 percent of caregivers met with their child's teachers two or fewer times across the previous four school terms. These meetings could explain children's learning gaps and provide guidance for home support. Additionally, only 40 percent of schools have WhatsApp groups connecting teachers and caregivers, which could be used to share class performance, lesson content, homework, and at-home support strategies.

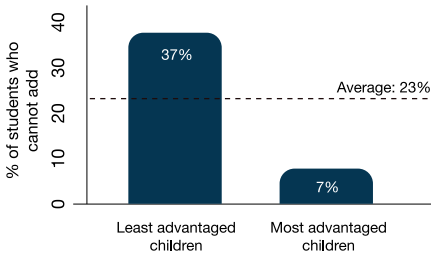
### **Finding 3: There is strong caregiver demand for more learning time and improving educational quality**

The survey also explored what caregivers thought schools could do to improve learning. Caregivers most commonly reported two solutions: (1) increasing learning time and (2) improving teaching quality including ability grouping. The sentiment about learning time could be due to some schools transitioning to a shift system in 2020 during the global pandemic. The survey found that about a quarter of schools still use a double shift system, with it being more common in Kweneng and North West than North East. On average, double shift school days were about 5.5 hours compared to 7 hours at schools that did not use a shift system. However, even a high share of caregivers in non-shifting schools called for more learning time, stressing they wanted extra lessons and tutoring. Caregivers also called for improved teacher training and higher-quality teaching, including grouping children in different classes by ability—for example, having two streams in mathematics (one more advanced and one less advanced).

### **Finding 4: There is a large disparity in performance among advantaged and disadvantaged groups**

The most salient factors of educational disadvantage in Botswana are gender, wealth, and location. Consistent with national trends, girls outperform boys, wealthier students outperform less wealthy students, and there is regional variation in performance. The study found that the most disadvantaged group is boys in North West in the lowest wealth bracket: among this group 37 percent cannot yet even add. For girls in North East in the highest wealth bracket, this figure is just seven percent. Figure 3 shows there is a 30 percentage point gap between the most and least advantaged groups in terms of students who have mastered the most basic operation.

**Figure 3: There is a large disparity in performance among advantaged and disadvantaged groups**



**Additional findings**

In addition to learning outcomes and caregivers’ impressions, the survey collected diverse information about children’s home and school environments. We present some key findings here.

Family ownership of cellphones is very high 100% cellphone ownership 80% smartphone ownership

Most students walk to school under 30 minutes



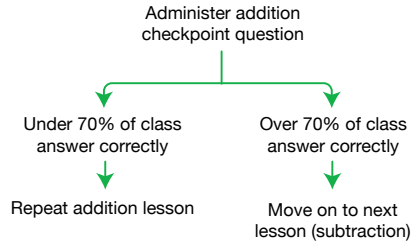
Physical discipline in schools is common 7 out of 10 caregivers reported their children have been physically disciplined at school

**Recommendations to improve learning**

**Incorporate targeted instruction approaches to strengthen foundational skills**

Children who fail to learn foundational skills struggle to catch up and fall behind in school, because more advanced concepts depend on the basics. The Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education, supported by Youth Impact, is implementing the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) program. This includes a targeted instruction “rule of thumb” that 70 percent or more of the class should master a skill before moving onto a more advanced skill. Figure 4 demonstrates how this “rule of thumb” works in practice. If 70 percent or more of the class masters addition, the teacher moves onto subtraction; if not, the teacher reinforces the addition lessons until the class has reached the 70 percent threshold.

**Figure 4: Example of how targeted instruction works**



As the Ministry updates the ETSSP, we recommend it considers including as explicit goals (1) teacher training related to targeted instruction and (2) utilizing the “remedial hour” for targeted instruction approaches suited to remediation.

**Inform caregivers about children’s skill levels and help them support learning**

When asked what strategies schools could use to improve learning, caregivers frequently suggested better communication about student results and strategies to improve them. Since most students need help with homework and over half of caregivers find homework content challenging, they could benefit from guidance on supporting their child’s learning. With over 80 percent of caregivers receiving PTA communication in 2024, PTAs could serve as a channel for sharing school-wide learning outcomes and strategies for home support. Additionally, given that approximately 40 percent of caregivers reported being in a WhatsApp group with their child’s teacher, these groups could also be used to share information about how to support learning at home.

**Measure foundational learning regularly**

Literacy and numeracy skills are the building blocks of any education system. Assessing these skills representatively over time helps identify the needs of students, caregivers, and educators. It also allows the system to better “right size” the curriculum to student capabilities and ensure more children achieve grade level proficiency, reducing learning gaps and leaving fewer children behind as they progress through school. The Education Compass survey aims to expand to more regions and competencies in 2025 and beyond.

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## About Youth Impact

Youth Impact is an evidence-based, youth-led organization based in Botswana that identifies, adapts, and scales health and education programs that work for young people. We use evidence to make them work even better and to help reach more young people in a more cost-effective way. We work hand in hand with governments to scale our programs through their systems. We share our findings widely to inform policies and evidence-based practices around the world.

We have two education programs in our portfolio, both of which focus on targeted instruction for foundational skills: Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), which is integrated into the school day, and ConnectEd, a remote tutoring program following the same principles. Both of these programs demonstrate strong learning gains over a matter of weeks. For TaRL, we find that in just 30 days approximately 60 percent of students in a classroom gain new literacy and numeracy skills, such as mastering a new operation or becoming stronger readers. We find similar learning gains from ConnectEd in just three, 40-minute tutoring sessions.

## About the Education Compass report

The Education Compass is Youth Impact's first annual report aimed at providing data on students' foundational skills in Botswana. Drawing on our research capacity developed through conducting rigorous program monitoring and evaluation, this survey seeks to inform regional and national discussions about learning progress and explore ways to enhance foundational education and promote caregiver engagement in learning. Regular surveys such as this are essential for tracking educational trends over time and contributing to evidence-based policymaking to support improved learning outcomes.

We would like to thank the Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education for their support in conducting this study, in particular the North East, North West, and Kweneng regional offices. We would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to the children and caregivers who made this study possible by participating in assessments and interviews.

Please contact [info@youth-impact.org](mailto:info@youth-impact.org) for more information about this study, or to engage about future annual studies. We are open to including additional questions in future versions that can benefit the sector.

