

## Authors

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After one year, public schools managed by private operators raised student learning by 60 percent compared to standard public schools. But costs were high, performance varied across operators, and contracts authorized the largest operator to push excess pupils and under-performing teachers into other government schools.

**"Partnership Schools" are free, public schools managed by private operators**

- Liberia's education system lags behind most of the world in both access and quality. Net primary enrollment was only 38 percent in 2015, and in 2013, among adolescents who finished elementary school, only 25 percent could read a complete sentence.<sup>1</sup>
- Under the new Partnership Schools for Liberia (PSL) program, the Government of Liberia delegated management of 93 public schools to eight operators: BRAC, Bridge International Academies, Youth Movement for Collective Action, More than Me, Omega Schools, Rising Academies, Stella Maris, and Street Child.
- PSL schools remained public schools: teachers in PSL schools remained on government payroll; schools remained property of the government and free to students; and contractors were prohibited from screening students based on ability or other characteristics.
- In addition to new management, the PSL program also brought extra resources. The government runs ordinary public schools on a budget of approximately \$50 (USD) per pupil, ranking 143th among 161 countries for which recent World Bank data is available. PSL operators received an additional \$50 per pupil from a pool of philanthropic funds managed by Ak, an education charity; the total of \$100 was deemed a realistic medium-term goal for public expenditure on primary education nationwide (and would represent a jump to 134th place). While teachers are in short supply in Liberia's public schools, the Ministry of Education made special staffing arrangements for PSL, providing more than two additional teachers per school.<sup>2</sup>
- The evaluation randomly assigned existing government schools to become PSL schools. Liberia's Ministry of Education commissioned a rigorous, independent evaluation of PSL's effectiveness. Because assignment of schools to the PSL or comparison groups was random, differences between the two groups can be attributed to the program. Schools were randomized after operators agreed on a school list, and students in the sample were selected from the enrollment logs of the school year before operators arrived. Therefore the results are not biased by operators selecting schools or rejecting students.

<sup>1</sup> The World Bank, "School enrollment, primary (PSR)", World Development Indicators, accessed August 20, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRV.SRVS>.  
Liberia includes official data and dissemination facilities, science development and youth and sports, Liberia Institute of Statistics and Demographic Services.

<sup>2</sup> Rosemary "The Librarian's Network."

<sup>3</sup> Because they were not subject to the same contracts, neither Bridge International Academies nor BRAC schools received the extra \$50 per pupil.

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**Country:** Liberia  
**Sample:** 3,409 students in 185 schools

The results presented here are an early analysis of the PSL program's first-year data and represent our best effort given the limited available data on which policy decisions are being made. An independent advisory committee of experts of researchers has provided feedback, but these results are preliminary and have not yet been independently peer-reviewed.

# Can a Public-Private Partnership Improve Liberia's Schools? Results from the First of Three Years

"Partnership Schools" are free, public schools managed by private operators. After one year, public schools managed by private operators raised student learning by 60 percent compared to standard public schools. But costs were high, performance varied across operators, and contracts authorized the largest operator to push excess pupils and under-performing teachers into other government schools. Read the full paper [here](#).

[A brief detailing results after three years is available here.](#)

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