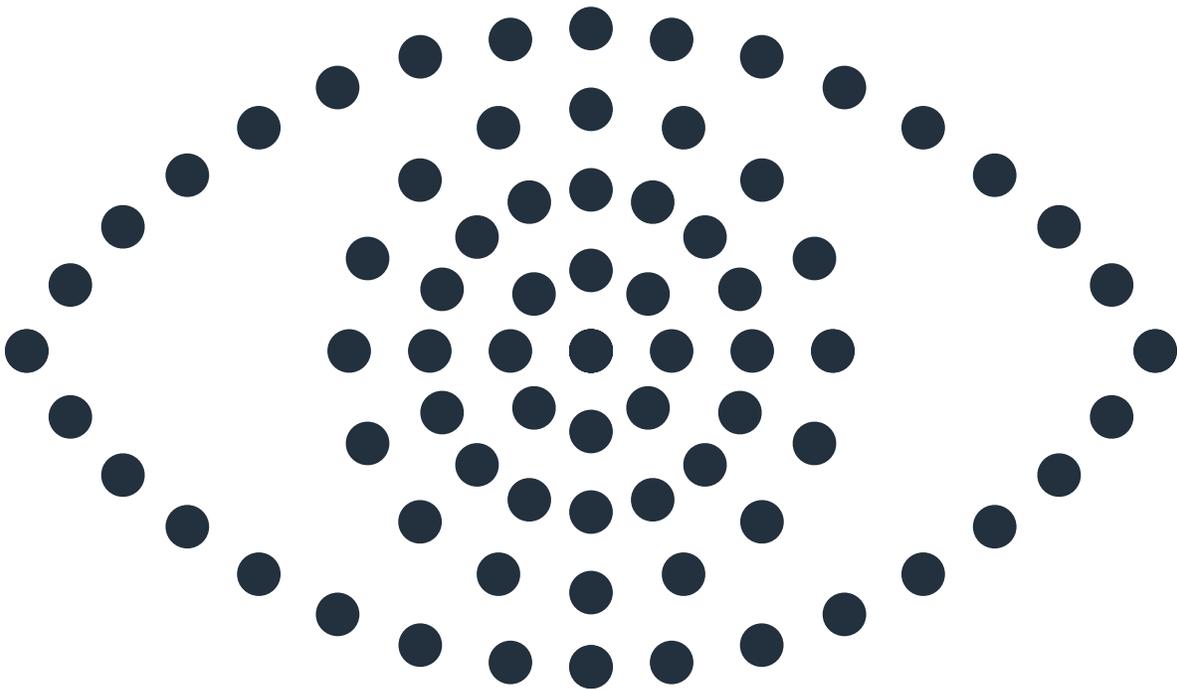


# Beyond the Mirage:

How pragmatic stewardship could transform learning outcomes in international education systems

**Topic:** Toward effective and accountable education systems that deliver outcomes at reasonable cost for the tax payer



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# Executive Summary

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**Education ministers and their leadership teams to shift from thinking ‘my job is to run the public education system’ to ‘my job is to ensure that all children receive a high-quality education.’**

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Emerging market education systems require dramatic improvement to prepare their young citizens for economic prosperity in the modern era. *Beyond the Mirage* argues that improving quality quickly will require education ministers and their leadership teams to shift from thinking ‘my job is to run the public education system’ to ‘my job is to ensure that all children receive a high-quality education.’ Education system leaders should see themselves as stewards of the system, seizing opportunities to work with private sector innovators to test new ideas, expand quality school choices, and challenge existing complacency. These actions will ensure the whole system adopts a mindset that focuses on learning outcomes as the core objective of their actions and activities. We call these leaders pragmatic stewards. They often see the private sector as collaborators and potential partners and they work to create programs and incentives aligned to reach their common goal: every student learning and achieving her/his potential.

One of the key areas where we see increased student outcomes is the growing private school sector. Of course, just as there are high performing government schools and low performing government schools, there are high performing private schools and low performing private schools. This report focuses on the developing success of the private school sector towards improving quality and highlights examples of public education systems that have adopted innovative programs to expound on the success of the private sector. We aim to look for combinations of private and public actors and seek to avoid false dichotomies by focusing on improving performance of both sectors, together. For the public system to work effectively with the private sector, the public system needs to be capable and focused on system outcomes. This essay illustrates three models that country leaders and education ministries could implement on the spectrum of education reform models from pure public provision to complete privatization.

While we don't advocate for any specific model, what we've seen work best is experimentation with a framework that lies towards the middle of the spectrum (i.e. a mix of public and private provision) and is tailored to the local context. Significant progress can be made quickly when pragmatic stewards ensure their entire system is focused on achieving specific goals and objectives that are measured and monitored regularly. Pragmatic stewards will consider a range of factors when choosing which models to adopt; the three models we've seen be most effective at driving transformation at scale are the following:

**Drive Delivery:** Improve and reform public provision with a focus on results and outcomes while leaving space for private sector school alternatives.

**Combine Forces:** Contract with private school management organizations and/or operators in a public private partnership arrangement.

**Unleash the Citizens:** Institute a variable-rate voucher system with public and private providers and appropriate quality measures.

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Each of the models can be successful but pragmatic stewards know that the challenge doesn't end at picking a strategy. Careful and deliberate attention must be paid to the details of implementation. In the essay, we expound on five actions that critical to implementation. These actions include:



1. Enable a range of different innovative models to 'join the cause' by allowing for both public and private provision. Learning innovations can also diffuse throughout education systems when private providers have room to innovate. Allowing a wider range of competent operators and investors to 'join the cause,' even if outside the public system, makes success more likely.
2. Ensure all providers are held accountable to delivering learning and contributing to system equity.
3. Help relevant providers improve their delivery through support tools. Building the capacity of actors in the system is as critical a system task as holding them accountable.
4. Reliable information on outcomes should be easily accessible to increase system accountability and enable informed resource allocation and so that parents can make informed consumer decisions
5. Insofar as resource allocation rewards success in delivering outcomes, decisions should be based on reliably-obtained data.

Around the world, we've seen bold education leaders introduce new regulatory frameworks to stimulate private sector involvement in education reform. In each instance, they used these pillars to design their innovative schemes to unleash the power of the private sector and drive forward implementation. While no attempt is perfect, we deep dive and highlight both the positives and the areas needing improvement through four case studies:

- **Liberia:** Partnership Schools for Liberia
- **Punjab, Pakistan:** Punjab Education Foundation and PPSP
- **Philippines:** Vouchers for Senior High School expansion
- **India:** The Education Alliance

Traditional tools and methods are not sufficient to transform education systems quickly enough. Pragmatic stewards should employ the private sector to help achieve their goals. As with all government-led reform, getting the strategy right is only 10% of the challenge; the rest lies in the relentless grind of implementation. No system can be successful without a central function that monitors results, solves problems, and employs judgment, all while remaining focused on outcomes. Leadership starts at the top and it's up to the political will of presidents, prime ministers, and education secretaries to see beyond the mirage.