Persistently inadequate levels of access and quality in education are leading many low and middle-income countries’ governments to seek partnerships with the private sector. Students around the world need improvements that their countries’ governments do not have the capacity alone to provide. These needs include more effective teachers, school infrastructure and supporting resources, as well as relevant curricula or job skills training that will enable children to learn and become productive participants in their economies. Governments and non-state entities have responded to these education challenges by making greater use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a way of improving the quality, provision, and accountability to education. But how are these partnerships taking shape?

The Center for Education Innovations (CEI) has profiled over 120 programs that work to leverage the public and private sectors. This number includes instances where organizations are contracted by the government to provide a service, but also emerging models where the private sector involves itself directly in services more traditionally provided by the state.
1. Building schools’ management capacity through training and community engagement:

Capacity building and training of school management officials is central to several of the PPP programs featured in the CEI database, spanning several regions. Interventions range from the creation of independent school management boards, capacity building for existing school management staff and committees, and promoting collaborative decision making by engaging and empowering local community members.

Performance Solutions Africa (PSA), which implements the Principal Management Development Programme in South Africa, demonstrates this approach in action. Under-performing schools are jointly identified by PSA and the Education Department, with donor and government funding supporting centralized monthly training and on-site coaching. This program, free-of-charge to the selected schools, focuses on upgrading the skills of school principals and their management teams, including effective methods of school governance, resource acquisition, and people management. This PPP is making a demonstrable impact, with PSA’s trainings resulting in a 12% improvement in Grade 12 results at participating KwaZulu-Natal schools.

Another program leveraging partnerships between public and private organizations, the Community Initiative to Strengthen Government Schools program in India partners with Gillette and the Government of...
2. Focusing on the skills that labor markets demand:

Preparing adolescent youths as they transition from school to a career is of utmost importance to both public and private parties within low and middle-income nations, and PPPs are increasingly forming to meet this critical need.

In Panama, Consejo del Sector Privado para la Asistencia Educacional’s (CoSPA) Instituto de Competitividad Juvenil (ICJ) is working to address one of the highest youth unemployment rates in its region. In addition to free courses and job skills training, ICJ’s job placement program works with the Department of Labor to connect vulnerable youth with local job and internship opportunities. Funding for this program comes from private institutions, the government, and community members; all groups that stand to benefit from a youth population better prepared for the modern workforce.

The Kenya Youth Empowerment Project (KYEP), a project of the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), is working alongside the Government of Kenya to implement a pilot training and internship project targeting approximately 11,000 youth. The program is aligned with Vision 2030 and focuses on six priority areas in the economy. Private sector employers also contributed to curriculum development to ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary to meet the labor demands.

3. Recruiting recent graduates as teachers:

The supply of degreed teachers varies by region and often does not match necessary staffing demands. To address this mismatch, programs are exploring different teacher recruitment
techniques. One well-developed example is Teach for All, the overarching network of country-based programs that targets recent graduates to serve in under-resourced cities and towns, particularly in communities with students from families in the lowest income brackets. Present in 30 countries, these chapters are encouraged to forge partnerships with governments and private organizations to subsidize teacher salaries, recruit candidates, provide financial and in-kind support, and ensure Teach For All alumni’s leadership skills are recognized and supported by employers.

Similarly, the Teacher Corps Scheme in Nigeria places science graduates in rural schools, with the hopes of modernizing the curriculum and teaching methods. These placements not only benefit the schools, which often have high pupil-teacher ratios, but also help the recent graduates develop practical skills for future employment.

4. Providing critical auxiliary services:

Aside from traditional learning activities, schools depend on a number of other services to provide students with quality education. Feeding children lunch, for example, is a service that is critical to students’ ability to learn. It is also a service that can make up a significant amount of a school’s expenditures. In response, private organizations are increasingly assisting public schools with these kinds of auxiliary services.

For instance, the Akshaya Patra Foundation (TAPF) Mid-Day Meal Program uses nineteen kitchens to deliver hot meals to school children in India, resulting in reduced hunger, increased enrollment, and improved child socialization. This partnership began in 2011 when Akshaya Patra was selected as the NGO implementer for the Supreme Court-mandated hot mid-day meal service, and now reaches 1.3 million school children in over 9,000 schools in India each day.

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5. Splitting funding roles and responsibilities:

In many instances, governments have the capacity to fund continuing operations for a school, but do not have the initial capital to build it in the first place. The opposite can also occur, with many public sectors able to fund initial construction costs, but subsequent funding needs cannot be met. PPPs are addressing these challenges with notable successes.

For example, Building Tomorrow (BT) in Uganda mobilizes communities to contribute 3 acres of land and secure private capital to fund 20,000 hours of unskilled labor. When built, these ten-room academies are turned over to the Ministry of Education, which then covers all recurring costs such as teacher salaries.

In the other direction, the ADEMA Education Program works with the Haitian government as the nation pursues a decentralized education model. ADEMA now operates seven public schools (and 23 low-cost private schools) in Haiti’s northwest region. Contracted by the government to implement Haiti’s education policies, ADEMA involves its own donors and diverse stakeholders from parents to political representatives to provide teacher-training, necessary equipment, and additional activities to engage over-aged and otherwise marginalized children.
This Database at a Glance reviews over 120 CEI-profiled programs and represents a wide range of the type of partnerships entered into by the public and private sectors. Results indicate that these PPPs can play an instrumental role in improving learning outcomes for larger numbers of children, and that both the private and public sector can see significant benefits when combining and coordinating their efforts. These partnerships allow programs to leverage existing infrastructure to expand their reach to what might be beyond their means if they operated independently. Similarly, governments can leverage the private sector skill and notably, their abilities to quickly adapt without hefty investment. In contexts where the need appears to be greater than current capacity, cooperation between public and private actors presents an exciting innovation for students around the world.