

POLICY BRIEF

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

Strengthening Multi-Level Governance Across Kenya's Devolved ECE System

BACKGROUND

Kenya's Constitution splits ECE governance between national policy-setting and county implementation. That split was meant to bring services closer to communities. Instead, coordination gaps between levels, unclear school-level accountability, and heavy reliance on parental financing have turned devolution into a source of disparity between counties, a structural problem no amount of classroom-level effort can fix on its own.

Immediate action:



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS (CoG)

Clarify school-level accountability, backed by national–county coordination.

Define, in writing, who at the school level answers for instructional quality, safety and resource use and align that with a joint national–county coordination mechanism for financing and standards. This is the review's own headline governance gap: weak, poorly defined school-level accountability was flagged as the systemic bottleneck limiting every other governance mechanism, echoed across the 14 studies that examined governance structures and processes directly.

This only works alongside three supporting actions:

KEMI &
COUNTY ECDE
DIRECTORATES

Build county governance capacity. Through leadership and planning training for county-level ECDE managers.

TREASURY,
CRA & COUNTY
TREASURIES

Equalize resource allocation. Transparent, needs-based financing that reduces reliance on parental contributions.

BOMs, PARENTS
& SCHOOL
COMMITTEES

Strengthen community governance. Give Parents Associations and Boards of Management a real role in planning and oversight.

METHODOLOGY

f the 28 studies in the wider review, 14 examined how leadership, management structures and governance processes shape learners’ experiences. A further, narrower check found that only 6 of the 28 studies were explicitly focused on governance in the Kenyan context; the remaining relevant studies were foreign or only loosely applicable, itself a governance evidence gap worth flagging to funders and researchers.



KEY FINDINGS

- 1

5 of 14 studies — County Systems Provide the Professional Backbone
County-level professional development and teacher-support structures were the most cited governance mechanism sustaining service delivery.
- 2

4 of 14 studies — Resourcing & Staffing Are Governed, Not Given
Staffing levels and working conditions traced directly back to how counties allocated and managed resources — not just how much was available.
- 3

4 of 14 studies — Community Governance Fills Institutional Gaps
Parents Associations and Boards of Management stepped in to sustain access and continuity where formal governance structures were weak.
- 4

3 of 14 studies — Accountability Systems Remain the Weakest Link
Formal accountability, regulation and quality-assurance mechanisms were the least developed governance function — the gap this brief’s priority action targets directly.

GOVERNANCE TIERS & WHERE THEY FALL SHORT

Governance Level	Key Role	Identified Gap
National Government	Policy formulation and standards	Limited funding commitment
County Governments	Implementation and resourcing	Capacity disparities
School Leadership	Operational management	Weak accountability
PAs & BOMs	Resource mobilization	Equity concerns
Oversight Agencies (QASOs)	Quality assurance	Infrequent supervision

“Devolution moved ECE closer to communities — accountability has not caught up.”

Weak, undefined school-level accountability was the most consistently flagged governance gap across the 14 studies examining ECE governance structures directly.

CONCLUSION

Governance reform starts with clear accountability, not more structure. Defining who answers for what at the school level, matched with real national–county coordination on financing and standards, is the precondition for every other governance investment, capacity-building, resourcing, and community participation to actually pay off.