

POLICY BRIEF

From Coordination to Learning: Redirecting National and County Government Collaboration Towards Foundational Learning Challenges

Executive Summary

National and County governments in Kenya now collaborate on early learning as a matter of routine. Respondents interviewed in five study counties (Nairobi, Kirinyaga, Kisumu, Kajiado and Marsabit) confirmed this. However, collaboration and the learning problems it is meant to solve are still treated as separate matters: only 13.6% of responses linked collaboration to a specific foundational learning challenge, while 84.3% described the two as parallel issues. Co-ordination is happening, but results are not following as they should. The Ministry of Education and county governments should require every collaboration structure to target a foundational learning gap, beginning in the 2026/27 school cycle.

The Problem

Kenya shares responsibility for education across two levels of government. The National government sets policy, deploys teachers through the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and runs quality assurance, while counties manage Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) infrastructure, local planning and daily administration. When the two levels coordinate, effort is not wasted; when they do not, the same task is done twice in one place and left undone in another.

Coordination is no longer the problem; what it is aimed at is. A total of 18 respondents across Nairobi, Kirinyaga, Kisumu, Kajiado and Marsabit confirmed active collaboration across six areas (i.e., *Management and administration of ECDE centers, Teacher training and capacity building, Data sharing and dissemination, Implementation of ECDE Programmes, Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, Special needs education*) of Early Childhood Development and Education delivery, yet many described that collaboration and the sector's learning challenges as parallel rather than connected. Meetings happen, data moves and teachers deployed, but few of these actions are tied to a specific learning gap they are meant to close.

What the Evidence Shows

Six functional areas of collaboration

Collaboration already runs across six functional areas: centre management, teacher training, data sharing, program delivery, monitoring and evaluation, and special needs education.



1.

Management and administration of ECDE centers: National and county governments work together on joint oversight, registration, teacher deployment and, in some cases, water, sanitation and feeding support.

In Kirinyaga, National Quality Assurance Officers and County Officers jointly oversee curriculum standards, while counties independently manage feeding and sanitation support, a pattern seen nationally through the School Meals Programme.

2.

Teacher training and capacity building: This priority area aims to close gaps in Competency-Based Education (CBE) through joint National and County support.

22 percent of Kirinyaga's ECDE teachers had received Competency Based Education training, a gap that can be addressed through cascade training models led jointly by KICD and county education offices.

3.

Data sharing and dissemination: This aims to support planning and decision making through harmonized data collection tools linking pre-primary and Grades 1 to 3.

Nairobi County's proposal to harmonise data tools with the TSC and the Ministry of Education mirrors national Education Management Information System (NEMIS) reforms already linking ECDE and Grade 1 to 3 data.

4.

Implementation of ECDE Programmes: These involve coordinated delivery of foundational learning programs across both levels of government.

Marsabit's classroom expansion plan, jointly funded by the county government and partners such as World Vision International, reflects national-county collaboration.

5.

Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning: These are carried out through zonal and cluster-based structures that link national quality assurance mandates with county-level oversight.

Kirinyaga's plan to intensify supervision by Curriculum Support Officers and Heads of Institutions reflects the zonal and cluster-based structures used nationally, linking national quality assurance mandates with county oversight.

6.

Special needs education: This is prioritized to ensure inclusive implementation of the curriculum and accounted for 11% of reported collaboration activities.

Kisumu's plan to link learners with special needs to Educational Assessment and Resource Centres shows this collaboration in practice, consistent with national policy requiring joint identification and placement of children with disabilities.

Two findings matter most. First, the co-ordination structure already exists: data tools already link pre-primary with Grades 1 to 3, and zonal and cluster structures already connect national quality assurance to county oversight. Second, that structure runs without a target. This means most recorded co-ordination is not channelled towards measurable outcomes, so activity cannot be expected to translate into progress.

Linkage between collaboration and sector challenges

13.6%

linked collaboration to specific foundational learning challenges.

84.3 %

described collaboration and sector challenges as parallel rather than connected issues. .

Kirinyaga is the exception. There, headteachers and county education offices jointly manage teacher deployment, materials distribution and whole-school integration of Early Childhood Development and Education, evidence that the model can carry weight when it is pointed at something.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Education (MoE), through the State Department for Basic Education, working with county education offices, should ensure that each existing collaboration structure is linked to a specific foundational learning problem that it intends to address. This approach should use existing structures rather than establish new ones, repurposing the ones already working. Specifically, the MoE and county governments should:

- Use the data tools already linking pre-primary and Grades 1 to 3 to name the priority learning gap in each county.
- Use existing county structures to measure real progress on learning gaps, rather than just tracking participation.
- Scale the Kirinyaga model as the working template.
- Begin in the 2026/27 school cycle and report progress within 12 months.

Conclusion

Kenya has already done the hard part; collaboration between National and County governments is now routine. The risk is mistaking that routine for success. The government already funds this collaboration through staff time, meetings and coordination structures. Pointed at a named learning gap, that investment can produce measurable gains in what children learn. Left undirected, it will keep funding meetings and reports instead of results. Begin in the 2026/27 school cycle and report progress within 12 months.

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Source: Ranji, J.K & K Muthomi's Catalyzing Evidence for Foundational Learning (CEFL) Initiative and the Unlocking Data Initiative

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