

## SIMCE 2010: Some Progress at Last

**It is positive to notice some progress in the learning capabilities achieved mostly by the lower socioeconomic groups. Even though public policies have the duty to support the poorest schools, we should have even more confidence in the changes that will occur with the Preferential School Subsidy Law, the educational reform and the future reorganization of municipal education. All these changes aim at improving the school management system, whose fulfilment should be decentralized and at the level of each individual school.**

The 2010 SIMCE results, a test applied annually by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) with the purpose of assessing the achievement of the key goals and current mandatory minimum contents, were published. Therefore, the subjects of mathematics, language, and understanding of the social and cultural environment, were evaluated.

### **What do the results show us?**

The main outcomes show us that in 4<sup>th</sup> grade an increase of 9 points was verified in the average reading score, in relation to the 2009 measurement (from 262 to 271 points), which is statistically relevant. In the last decade we had not observed significant improvements in the performance of students in this subject, so we observe a trend break regarding the tests applied in previous years. The remaining assessments taken in this level (mathematics and understanding of the social and cultural environment) do not report significant changes (Table 1).

In the test applied to the 10<sup>th</sup> grades, a significant change is observed in math with regard to the last assessment carried out in 2008. However, the reading test does not register a significant improvement (Table 2).

Another important variation refers to the students' Achievement Levels (NDL in Spanish), where we also observe a relative improvement. This evaluation criterion classifies students in score ranges that measure if they have achieved specific learning capabilities in their respective level or

class.<sup>i</sup> Thus, students who achieved the advanced level in reading increased from 38% to 45% between 2008 and 2010, while students classified in the initial level, fell from 35% to 27% in those years. In math there was also an increase of the students who achieved the advanced level, from 39% to 45%, and a decrease, from 34% to 27% in the initial level, between 2009 and 2010 (see Chart 1).

Table 1

SIMCE AVERAGE SCORES 4 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE			
Subject	2009	2010	Variation 2009-2010
Reading	262	271	9*
Mathematics	253	253	0
Understanding of the Environment	250	255	5

Source: [www.simce.cl](http://www.simce.cl)

\*Statistically relevant increase.

Table 2

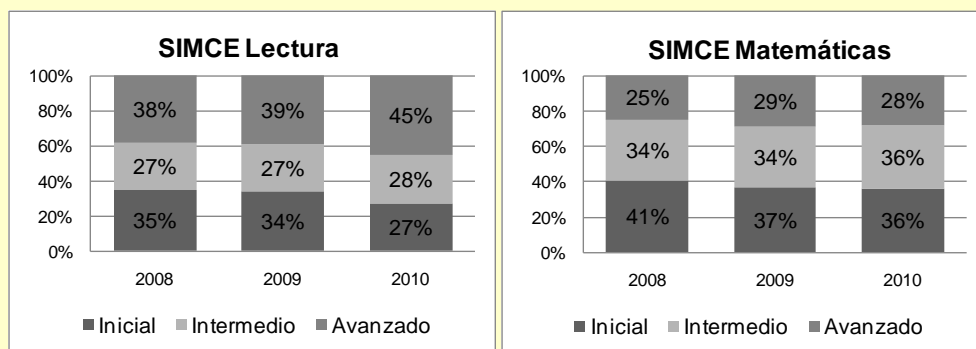
SIMCE AVERAGE SCORES 10 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE			
Subject	2008	2010	Variation 2008-2010
Reading	255	259	4
Mathematics	250	256	6*

Source: [www.simce.cl](http://www.simce.cl)

\*Statistically relevant increase.

Chart 1

## EVOLUTION OF 4<sup>TH</sup> GRADE STUDENTS PERCENTAGE BY ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS



Source: [www.simce.cl](http://www.simce.cl)

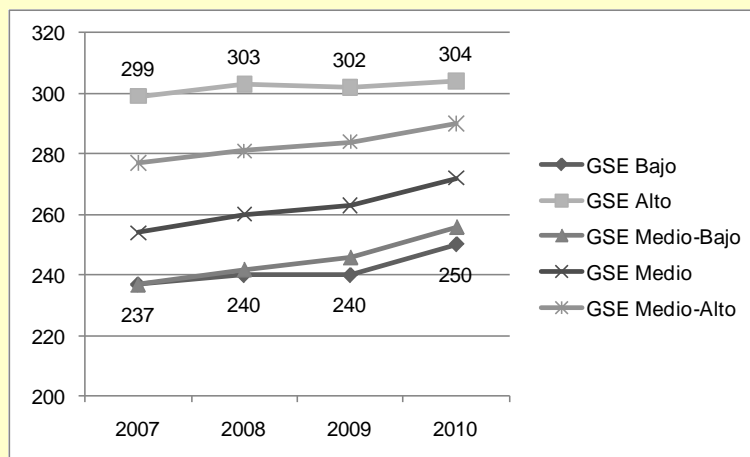
## Gap reduction by socioeconomic level

It is also important to verify that the gap according to high and low socioeconomic levels decreased somewhat between 2009 and 2010, from

62 to 54 points, in language. This is a positive thing, since the trend observed in the last decade did not show any significant improvement in this matter. In math, however, this did not occur.

Chart 2

## READING SCORE GAP BY SOCIOECONOMIC LEVEL 4<sup>TH</sup> GRADE



Source: [www.simce.cl](http://www.simce.cl)

### What are the possible explanations for better results achieved in 2010?

It seems right to ask what is the reason for this change of trend, considering that there have been no major changes in the education system in Chile between 2009 and 2010, and that the educational reform approved early this year should show its effects only as of the 2011 SIMCE.

Even if more detailed studies are necessary to understand what lies behind this improvement, a possible explanation is that the outcome dissemination policies may have influenced schools in some way. Although the introduction of the “traffic lights” which classified schools according to their results in the SIMCE tests was highly criticized, the information delivery always helps parents take better decisions regarding where to enrol their children. Additionally, this may have caused bad qualified schools to take measures aiming at improving their performance. Even though there is no recent information available concerning enrolment by institution, in the last years we have seen an enrolment reduction trend in municipal schools with worst average performances. According to the information from the MINEDUC, between 2000 and 2010, nearly 500,000 students migrated

from the municipal education; 500 schools closed in that period, while, at the same time, approximately 2,000 private subsidized schools were created. This type of schools has always obtained better results in the SIMCE tests<sup>ii</sup>.

Table 3

4 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE SIMCE EVOLUTION BY INSTITUTION						
	Mathematics			Language		
	2008	2009	2010	2008	2009	2010
<b>Municipal</b>	232	236	237	249	248	258
<b>Private Subsidized</b>	254	259	258	267	267	276
<b>Private Paid</b>	301	303	299	307	301	303

Source: [www.simce.cl](http://www.simce.cl)

On the other hand, it is also possible that better outcomes achieved in language in the lowest socioeconomic level are due to the implementation and consolidation of the Preferential School Subsidy (SEP, in Spanish). This subsidy benefits, with higher resources, the students and schools showing greater social vulnerability. The SEP Law also enables to promote educational technical assistance by trained institutions called "ATE", with the purpose of improving the performance of those schools and envisages the contribution of resources for this task, thereby forcing the assisted schools to present an improvement Plan to the MINEDUC, and to commit themselves to fulfil it by subscribing an agreement with this Ministry. Currently, there are nearly 500 organizations in the whole country which are supporting the poorest schools in this process.<sup>iii</sup>

Along these lines, and due to the positive progress being achieved by the application of this Law, it seems right to question the application of another parallel program, implemented by the MINEDUC, which deals with the same targets. We are talking about the "Shared Support Program" which will benefit nearly 1,100 municipal and private subsidized schools with lowest performance in the whole country, and which started to receive technical support from the Ministry of Education in order to improve their learning outcomes. This program will focus on pre-school to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, including the application of the school curriculum and the involvement of advisors from the MINEDUC in each assisted school. Even though this plan is praiseworthy, it pursues the same objectives as the SEP Law. Besides from the fact that it means an effort duplicity, it is also a highly centralized program, with great government control, in an education system which seeks to recognize an increasing importance to decision-making at the level of each school, and to give, in accordance with the ongoing educational reform, wide faculties to the principals and more responsibilities

to the teachers concerning the students' progress. The support work is very complex, and evidence shows that it is hard to reverse results in low performance schools. Therefore, the convenience of continuing with the new program should be re-evaluated, even more so considering that there are previous experiences of centralized interventions which did not yield the expected outcomes, such as the 900 schools Program which was also a support program for the poorest schools, carried out in the nineties (P-900)<sup>iv</sup>.

### Conclusions

It is positive to notice some progress in the learning capabilities achieved mostly by the lower socioeconomic groups. Even though public policies have the duty to support the poorest schools, we should have even more confidence in the changes that will occur with the Preferential School Subsidy Law, the educational reform and the future reorganization of municipal education. All these changes aim at improving the school management system, whose fulfilment should be decentralized and at the level of each individual school.

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<sup>i</sup> Reading in 4th grade: Advanced Level: 281 points and over, Medium Level: 241-280 points, Initial Level: 245 points or less. In Math, Advanced Level: 286 points and over, Medium Level: 233-285 points, Initial Level: 245 points or less.

<sup>ii</sup> Interview with the Ministry of Education, La Tercera, January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> [www.registroate.cl](http://www.registroate.cl)

<sup>iv</sup> Tokman, A. Evaluation of the P-900 Program: A Targeted Education Program for Underperforming Schools. Banco Central de Chile, Work Document Nr 170, July, 2002.