

2. What role does government play in the design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of education?

The government plays a very significant role in education in Costa Rica, because the government funds primary and secondary education, and in some cases higher education (the public universities) in Costa Rica. Also, in 2001, the government decided Costa Rica would invest no less than 8% of their GDP (growth domestic product) into education, which goes along with the trend in Costa Rica that the government would spend as much money as they can in education. Costa Ricans believe education is the tool to solve many problems, which is why the army was abolished in 1948 and that money went into the education system. Therefore, students know they have a big responsibility with education and should try to do their best. However, the fact that the system has been centralized for so many years does not contribute to making the education system most effective.

The Ministry of Education has a monitoring system that oversees schools by sending supervisors to make sure educational standards are being met. Also in terms of supervising, principals send quarterly reports back to the Ministry of Education, which is something they complain about because it's a lengthy, complex task. It has become a bureaucratic problem, since in an educational system, when teachers or the system is over-assessed, it becomes an overwhelming process both for teachers and students. Steps are being taken to make this process more effective.

In terms of academic assessment, after completing their high school education, students have to take Exámenes de bachillerato, which are comprehensive exit exams. and do not get their diploma until they pass the exams. The tests were designed and implemented by ministry of Public education back in the 18th century, and later eliminated because they were thought to be too bureaucratic and too overwhelming on the students and teachers. But around 1995, the minister of education decided that the quality of education system in Costa Rica needed a boost, so he brought back the exams, and they have been in place since then.

Teachers are not supposed to “teach to the test”, even though there might be a tendency to do so. Instead, they have sessions dedicated to test preparation, using practice materials from the Ministry of Education. Teachers are also reminded to comply with the principles that characterize the current Costa Rican education system, which has a Humanistic and Constructive approach, and is very hands-on.