

# Raising the Bar



MPL REPORT - 2025



# WHY RAISING THE BAR?

**R**aising the Bar is about lifting expectations and aspirations.

Poor educational outcomes are common for Cambodian children, especially in rural locations in northern Cambodia. At SBB we have found that appropriate, well-targeted interventions can generate lasting, positive change.

This report outlines the SBB approach and presents evidence of how our interventions help drive this change. It shows that there is real potential to **Raise the Bar** for community expectations regarding children's educational achievements.

The multifaceted and inclusive approach of our Transform Education Program (TEP) is aligned with the World Bank's *Smart Buys for Improving Global Learning* report which recommends:

- Nurturing community engagement in educational learning; and
- Transforming teacher effectiveness as the most powerful interventions to invest in.

To this end the TEP engages communities, education authorities, school leaders and teachers to create an enhanced educational environment. It demonstrates that, with more effective educational practices which improve teaching and learning, success at school can be a realistic aspiration for all.

That's why SBB remains committed to **Raising the Bar**.



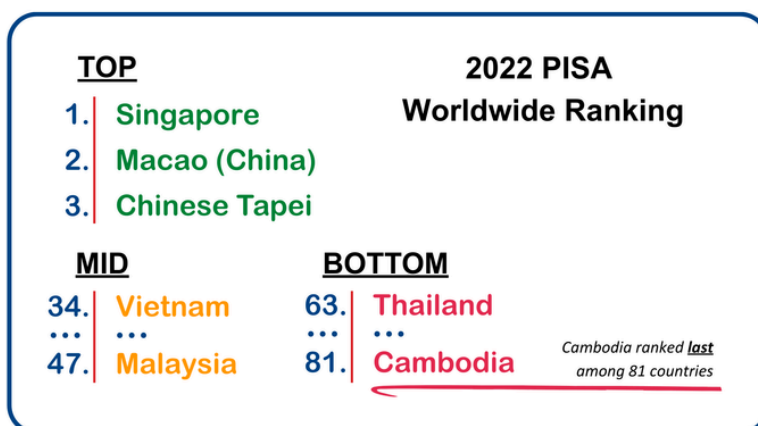
# A CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS

Cambodia faces what the World Bank has referred to as a 'learning crisis'. The country was ranked last among all participants in the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Within Cambodia, northern Cambodia is particularly disadvantaged.

## ➤ Global Inequality

*Cambodia ranked last of 81 countries that participated in the 2022 PISA assessment*

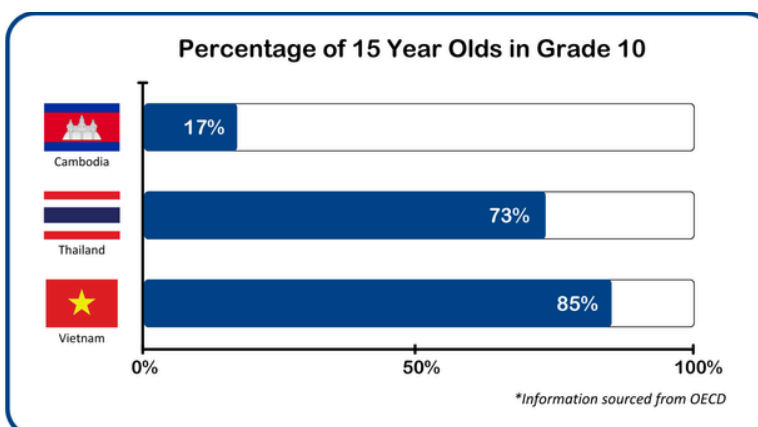
Figure 1



## ➤ Regional Inequality

*Only 17% of 15 year-olds in Cambodia are in Grade 10, compared with 73% in Thailand and 85% in Vietnam*

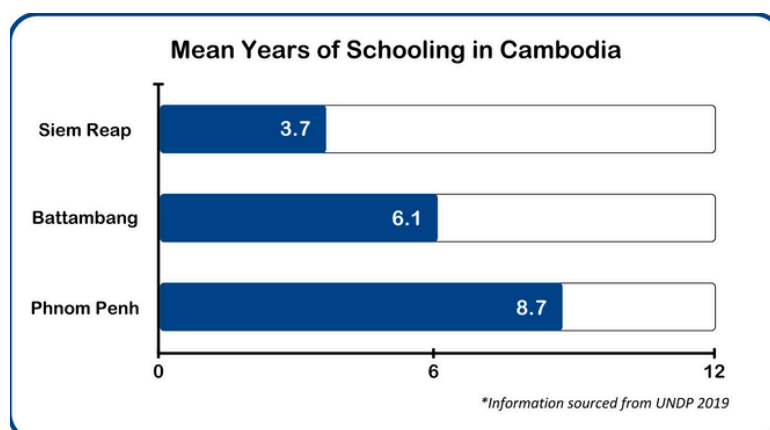
Figure 2



## ➤ National Inequality

*In northern Cambodia, mean years of schooling is 3.7 in Siem Reap Province, and 6.1 in Battambang, compared with 8.7 years in the capital, Phnom Penh*

Figure 3



# TRANSFORMING EDUCATION

SBB targets the furthest behind districts in the furthest behind provinces in northern Cambodia, where the need is greatest and there are real opportunities to generate significant change. Through the holistic approach of our signature Program, the **Transform Education Program (TEP)**, SBB nurtures **Communities of Practice** which support shared learning among educators, and engage the wider community in the life-long benefits of quality early primary education.

Locally-led District **Teacher Development Centres** are established and resourced as sustainable hubs for collaborative learning, professional development and community engagement. They provide a much-valued forum for building the expertise of school leaders, strengthening teachers' professional identity and improving the skills and capacities of teachers, all of which contribute to sustained quality teaching and learning.



## What is the SBB Transform Education approach?

This signature SBB Program is delivered through five integrated Projects which together build a sustainable foundation to enable locally-led, long-term delivery of quality teaching and learning:

- **Teacher Development Centres (TDC):** These dedicated centres support effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) among teachers, mentors and school leaders, fostering local communities of teacher-led practice improvement and innovation.
- **Leadership in Learning (LIL):** Equips school leaders to build community and school cultures which promote improved teaching and learning outcomes within their schools.
- **Teacher Professional Identity (TPI):** Sustainably empowers teachers to identify and pursue their goals, creating their own professional development pathways to build their confidence, self-esteem and standing in their communities.
- **Maths Teacher Mentoring (MTM):** Establishes the practice of effective teacher mentoring, creating collaborative communities of educators who champion and share best practices to improve student learning outcomes.
- **Literacy Teacher Mentoring (LTM):** Equips teachers with multiple literacy-teaching strategies and resources, together with on-going support, to deliver better student learning outcomes.

## Is the TEP approach effective?

To understand the effectiveness of SBB's approach to *Raising the Bar*, we look to first identify changes in students' educational outcomes as indicated by the results of Minimum Proficiency Level assessments.

At this time there is clear evidence that:

- In Battambang Province, where our Quality Teaching Program has been tracked for 4 years, **students' achievements in both Maths and Literacy have shown ongoing improvement over time.**
- In Siem Reap Province, after only one year of implementation of our TEP interventions, there is already **significant improvement in students' achievement in Maths.**

We attribute these outcomes significantly to interventions that directly improve **teacher effectiveness**. These interventions are supported by our integrated approach to the wider school environment. Data, as well as testimonials from parents, school leaders and teachers, tell us that improved community engagement, the cultivation of positive school cultures by motivated school leaders, and the enhancement of teachers' professional identity, lay a strong foundation for improved teaching and learning in schools.

## MINIMUM PROFICIENCY LEVELS

**Minimum Proficiency Levels, known as MPLs, are a standard tool used in the education sector internationally, and in Cambodia.** They represent the 'bare minimum' proficiency expected of students in each subject at each grade level. There is still much room for improvement above the MPLs, but scoring below these levels suggests that a student does not have a basic grasp of the subject for their grade level. **Achievement of MPLs is a crucial measure in monitoring progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4.1.**

A total of 57 assessors, a mix of trainee teachers, graduates and university students, were recruited and trained to undertake the MPL assessments. None of these assessors were SBB employees.

A random sampling method was employed with a sample size of 30%. Students' names were arranged alphabetically, and a third interval was used for maths assessments, while a fifth interval was applied for literacy.

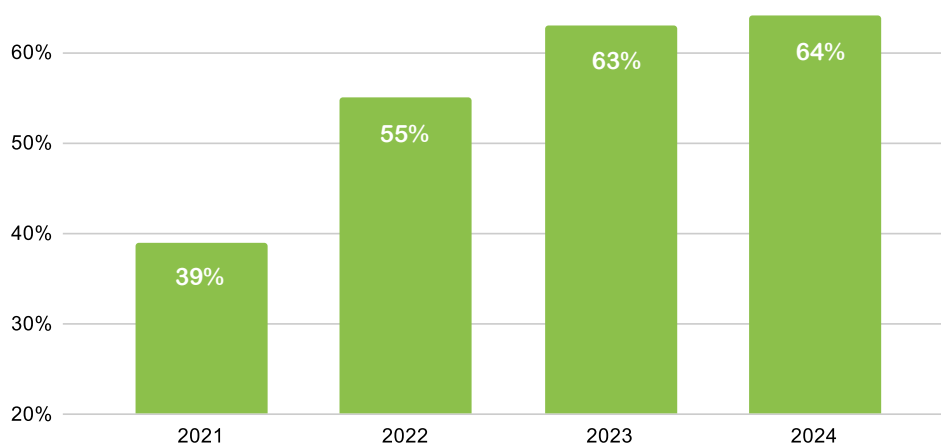
For the maths assessment, all students in a class took the one-hour test simultaneously. Papers were selected based on the sampling method outlined. The literacy assessment took approximately 15 minutes for each student to complete individually. Students were selected following the process outlined and left the classroom one-by-one for the assessment while the others continued their lessons. A total of 2,810 grade 1-3 students from 44 schools participated in these assessments.



## BATTAMBANG PROVINCE

Creating long-term, sustainable change is SBB's core purpose in working to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Cambodia. SBB's **Quality Teaching** interventions have been implemented in the Ek Phnom district of Battambang Province, where **the percentage of students reaching MPLs for Maths in SBB participating schools has increased year-on-year** (See Figure 4). In Battambang, 64% more students are now reaching MPLs in Maths compared to 2021. This indicates that the long-term impact of SBB interventions in schools has been both effective and sustained.

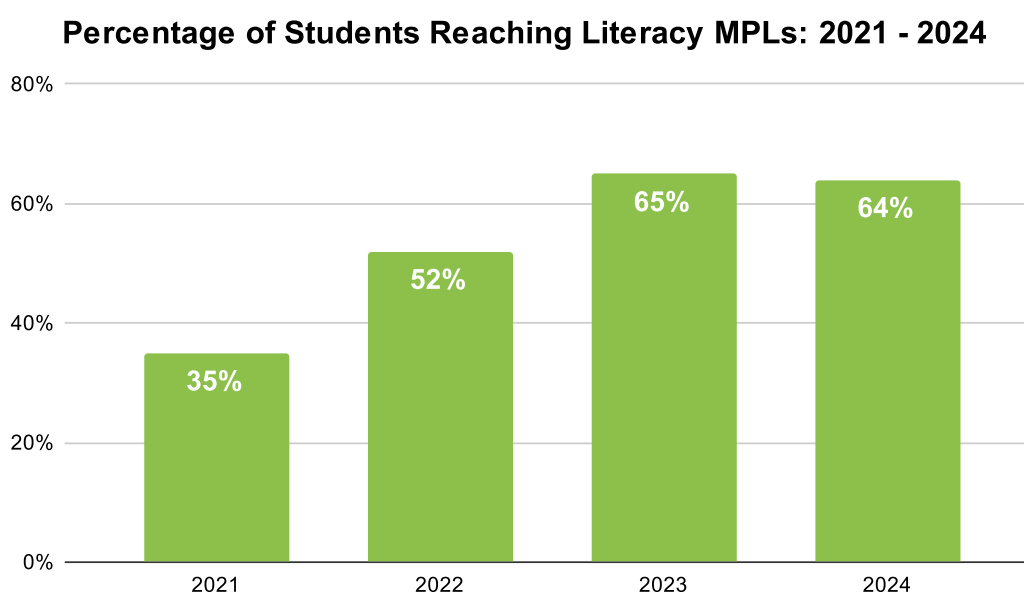
**Percentage of Students Reaching Maths MPLs: 2021 - 2024**



**Figure 4**

The SBB Literacy Project intervention in Ek Phnom was implemented over a number of years and ended in December 2023. The focus of this intervention was on improving the professional knowledge and skills of teachers in literacy instruction in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. Proven literacy methodologies and effective resources were introduced and adapted to ensure that teachers could implement these new methodologies in their classrooms to improve student learning outcomes.

The success of this intervention is evident as shown in Figure 5. Between 2021 and 2023 there was a 30 percentage point increase in the proportion of students reaching Literacy MPLs. In the following year, after the literacy project had ended, that much higher achievement was maintained. This bodes well for the sustainability of the improvement in student learning outcomes achieved during the intervention.



**Figure 5**

After the direct intervention in Ek Phnom ends, the focus of SBB will move to the neighbouring district of Banan where TEP will be delivered beginning in October 2025. SBB will also continue to offer support to the local authorities in Ek Phnom as they take on increasing responsibility for the quality of education in the district.

**Watch this video to learn more about how the SBB Literacy Project has impacted not just children, but also parents and community members.**



# SIEM REAP PROVINCE



In November 2023, SBB launched the Transform Education Program in Kralanh and Srei Snam. These are two of the furthest behind districts in Siem Reap province, which is itself among the furthest behind provinces in Cambodia. Schools in these districts were invited to apply to participate in the program and SBB selected those that demonstrated the most need and the greatest capacity to create lasting change.

During the first year of the program, the focus was on establishing a strong foundation for sustainable impact over time. This has included facilitating better leadership, developing teacher professional identity, enabling community engagement and setting up systems of mentorship.

- In collaboration with local District Offices of Education, Teacher Development Centres were established as Community of Practice hubs for shared problem solving and pedagogical innovation.
- A Leadership in Learning project was initiated to enable principals and deputy principals to develop more effective leadership approaches and skills through experiential workshops and interactive discussions.
- The strengthening of Teachers' Professional Identity has begun with teachers planning their own personal development agenda to build confidence and self-esteem as professional and capable educators.
- Through the Maths Teacher Mentoring project, five workshops have been delivered for master mentors, mentors, and grade 1-3 teachers on maths concepts and effective teaching and mentoring.
- Quality teaching resources have been developed and customised to support students' learning.

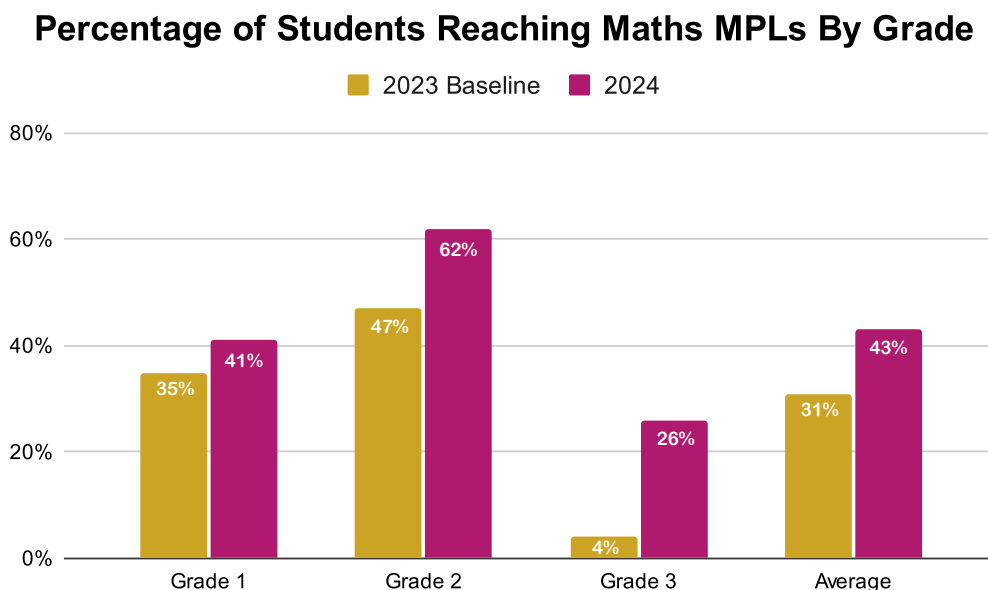
In all our work SBB seeks to:

- Improve educational outcomes for students by improving teacher effectiveness.
- Ensure this improvement is sustained after SBB interventions cease.



## Maths Achievement

After only one year an average of 39% more students across all grades are achieving Maths MPLs than before intervention.



**Figure 6**

These results indicate that the SBB intervention has already been successful in significantly improving student learning outcomes in maths. With such progress in only one year, the potential for greater improvement in learning outcomes and sustainable impact in participating schools is very promising.



## Teacher Professional Identity

Given the evidence indicating that the teacher is the most important part of any educational system, a key element of the Transform Education Program is facilitating the professional development of teachers to reach their full potential through the Teacher Professional Identity Project. This project has been developed following on from our work in the [Professional Identity of Khmer Teachers research collaboration](#) and is designed so that improvements in teacher effectiveness will be sustained and enhanced as teachers' personal motivation and commitment are strengthened. We believe this will help ensure improvements in student learning outcomes will continue after our program ends. Structured observations enable the evaluation of teachers as either low, medium, or highly skilled in three core areas: Classroom Culture, Socioemotional Skills and Instruction.

After one school year, the percentage of teachers evaluated as “low” in each skill decreased, in comparison with baseline assessments, demonstrating a significant improvement in each core area. For Socioemotional Skills, where the percentage of “low” evaluations was highest at baseline, 71% of teachers are now at “medium” skill level (See Figure 7). With ongoing support, teachers can continue to improve and develop in these critical areas.

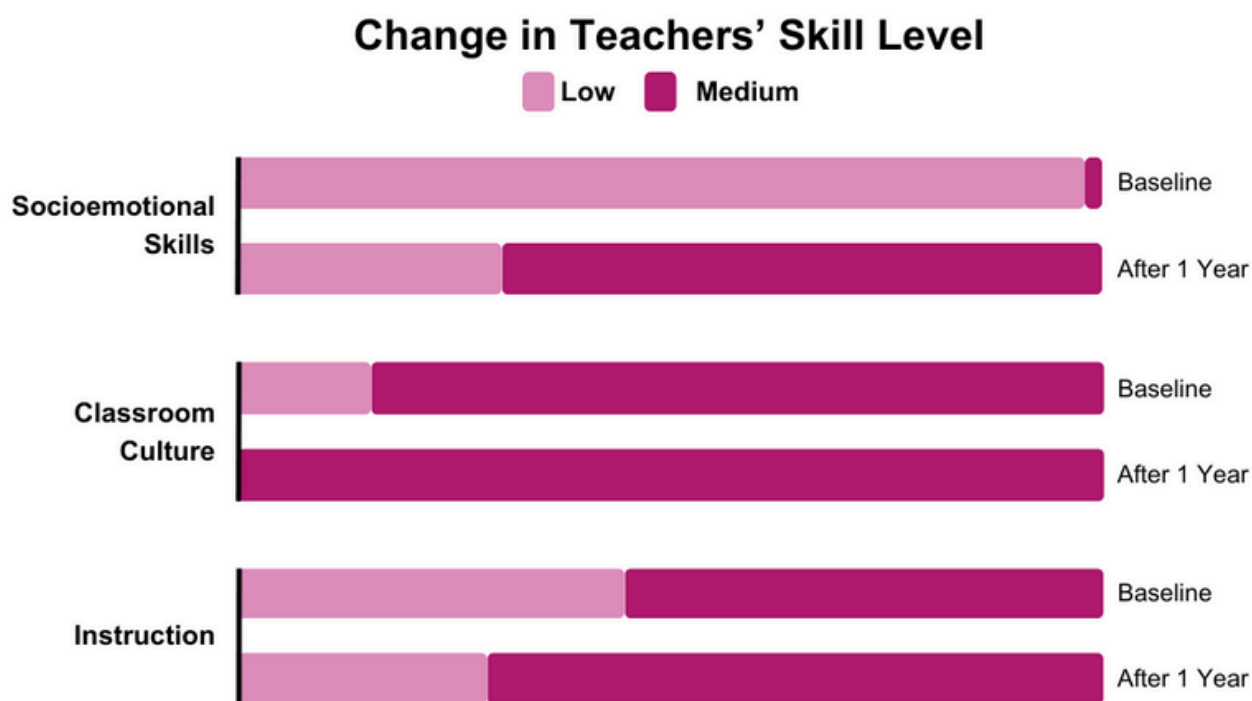


Figure 7

## ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS

### Gender Disparity

Across all schools in which MPL assessments were administered, girls achieved MPLs at a rate 11.5% higher than boys on average (See Figure 8). The disparity in learning outcomes between boys and girls is not only a phenomenon in SBB participating schools, but a consistent trend across Cambodia and globally. For SBB, it is critical to continue to interrogate these findings to better inform future interventions.

Percentage of Students Achieving MPLs By Gender Across All MPL Assessments Administered

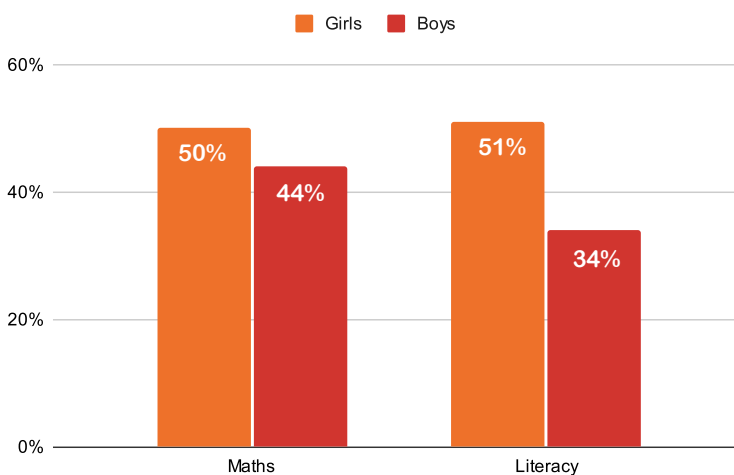


Figure 8

*\*2,810 total Grade 1-3 students (52% female) assessed*



## CHANGE FOR THE FUTURE

In preparing this report, SBB recognises that some of the data is imperfect and/or incomplete. However, **it is clear that the interventions are making a positive difference to students' learning outcomes, and that their impact is increasing over time. More effective teaching means that more students are able to achieve MPLs.**

Some important lessons have been learned which will inform the design and implementation of new programs into the future. Some areas of concern, such as the significant regional learning inequalities and the need to ensure children with disabilities can access school, have also been highlighted, indicating the need for further research to better understand the issues involved. In addition, longitudinal studies to determine the impacts of improved early learning on drop-out rates will be very valuable in guiding future decision-making.

To further strengthen SBB's work, and to have greater influence at policy level to create lasting system change, adequate resources to undertake additional research are needed. **We must be able to gather the evidence to clearly demonstrate causation in order to *Raise the Bar* and deliver real outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and communities in Cambodia.**

**However, such research will require significant additional resources which are not currently available to SBB.**

# In 2025 SBB is Raising the Bar for:

## ➤ 6,674 STUDENTS

**39%\*** more students across all grades achieved Maths MPLs after one year of intervention in Siem Reap

## ➤ 130 TEACHERS

**55%\*** of teachers increased their abilities by one level or more on the Teacher Skill Scale after one year

*"Education is crucial for children who are our nation's future"*  
...from a Teacher

*"Before, I had never received any training on leadership .....Now I have learned so much"*  
...from a School Principal

## ➤ 48 SCHOOL LEADERS

**53%\*** of school leaders report increased confidence in their leadership skills after only one year

## ➤ 31 SCHOOLS

**885\*** community members attended school-led Education Inspires events in 2024

*"I'm so proud of the students' success in the school"*  
....from a Parent



Watch this video to learn about the community's response to childrens' success at school.

*\*These figures are Siem Reap specific*

