Case Studies on National Testing Centers: Comparative Analysis of National Testing Center in Kyrgyzstan and Recommendations for Tajikistan

Research Report

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August, 2010

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List of Abbreviations

ACCELS	American Councils for Collaboration in Education and Language Study
AUCA	American University in Central Asia
CEATM	Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods
KAE	Kyrgyz Academy of Education
MOES	Ministry of Education and Science
NEPC	Network of Education Policy Centres
NSBA	National Sample-Based Assessment
NST	National Scholarship Test
NTC	National Testing Centre
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
ToR	Terms of Reference
UCA	University of Central Asia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

(Draft)

Case Studies of National Testing Center in Kyrgyzstan

Duishon Shamatov

Introduction

This is a report on an independent testing organization in Kyrgyzstan, the Centre for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM), and is part of a larger study of case studies on testing organizations in four countries (Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine)[1]. The study is being sponsored by the Network of Education Policy Centres (NEPC). The objective of the study is to identify factors that constrain or obstruct the realization of the three objectives set for national testing centres. These objectives are: (i) institutionalization of fair and transparent student assessments; (ii) use of those assessments for the improvement of quality of teaching; and (iii) achievement of equity.

Methodology

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the national expert provided by the NEPC and the analytical framework for the case study provided by lead researcher Sergij Gaberscek provided a framework for the research process. A qualitative research design was adopted, to provide a comprehensive and contextualized account that takes into account complex, multidimensional dynamics, alternative ways of knowing, expressing and acting upon reality, and sensitivity to local perspectives (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Merriam, 1988). The data were collected between April and August, 2010.[2] Tools employed for data collection were interviews, document collection and analysis, focus group interviews, and informal conversations.

Purposeful sampling was used to gain the maximum possible data (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984) from expert respondents about the independent testing organization. Respondents to semi-structured interviews included representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz Academy of Education (KAE), specialists from the independent testing organization (CEATM), representatives of the international donor agencies, local education experts working in international development organizations, professors from public and private universities, school administrators and teachers, community members and students. Specifically, among the interviewed were the following: Kamila Sharshekeeva (who was a Minister of Education when National Scholarship Testing was established in Kyrgyzstan), John Clark (long-time advisor to Kamila Sharshekeeva), Todd Drummond (former director of ACCELS[3] who initiated NST in Kyrgyzstan), Meerim Kadyrova and Chynara Batrakeyva (both staff members of CEATM). In total, 30 people were interviewed. Prior to being interviewed, the respondents were informed of the purpose and nature of the study and their consent to be interviewed was obtained (Cohen & Manion, 1997; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Glesne, 1999).

Document analysis was another investigative tool (Bell, 1993). Materials, reports and other documents were reviewed and analyzed, including conference presentations, mass media articles,

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[1] There is a government national testing centre in Kyrgyzstan, which is a branch of the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES), established in May 1993 as a non-commercial organization under a Presidential decree. This report is not about this government National Testing Centre, but rather is about the non-governmental, independent testing organization, the Centre for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM).

[2] In addition, I used data from my previous research work and data related to National Scholarship Testing, e.g. Shamatov & Sainazarov (forthcoming).

[3] American Councils for Collaboration in Education and Language Study. Currently, it is American Councils for International Education: ACTR / ACCELS.

research reports, documents and reports of the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES), reports by CEATM, and mass media materials, Central Asian Forum organized by CEATM in November of 2009[4] and TV programmes of Open Kyrgyzstan of Soros Foundation, Kyrgyzstan[5].

Data analysis is a rigorous process of systematically searching and arranging the accumulated data (Bogdan & Bicklen 1998; Merriam 1988; Niyozov 2001). In this project, data analysis involved making sense of the data by arranging them into coherent and plausible arguments. A combination of data analysis techniques such as noting patterns and themes, and noting relations between variables were used to analyze the data and generate meaning from the accumulated data (Miles & Huberman 1994).

Contextual Background

Kyrgyzstan, officially the Kyrgyz Republic, is a small, landlocked, mountainous country located in Central Asia. Bordered by China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, it encompasses 198,500 square kilometres. The population of Kyrgyzstan is over 5 million people from over 90 nationalities and ethnic groups (Ibraimov, 2001). The Turkic-speaking Kyrgyz, one of the most ancient people of Central Asia (Jusupov, 1993), constitute about 65 percent of the country's population. The capital of the country is Bishkek, which has a population of about 790,900 (Ibraimov, 2001). Kyrgyzstan is divided into seven administrative provinces: Batken, Chüi, Naryn, Osh, Jalal-Abad, Talas, and Yssyk Köl.

Kyrgyzstan was one of the 15 republics that made up of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Soviet rule was established in Kyrgyzstan between 1918 and 1922 (Akiner, 1998; Landau & Kellner-Heinkele, 2001), and for over 70 years Kyrgyzstan was an integral part of the USSR, serving as its mountain outpost (Gleason, 1997, cited in De Young, 2001). As part of the Soviet scheme to establish national republics in Central Asia, the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous *Oblast* was formed within the Russian Federation in October, 1924 (Haugen, 2003). It then became the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in February, 1926; and the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic in December, 1936 (Ibraimov, 2001; Soktoev, 1981).

The USSR broke up in December, 1991 and Kyrgyzstan became independent. Gaining independence aroused the hopes and aspirations of the people of Kyrgyzstan (Akiner, 1998). Askar Akaev, the first president of Kyrgyzstan, introduced an array of reforms, such as gaining membership in international organisations, introducing a national currency (the som), privatization, shifting from a monistic power structure to a pluralistic electoral system and moving from a centralized state economy to a market-oriented economy (Abazov, 2004). Kyrgyzstan gained a reputation abroad as a leader of democracy in Central Asia; the term of "Island of Democracy" was popularly used to refer to the country (Megoran, 2002; Meyer, 2003).

Despite these growing hopes in the West, the USSR's break-up brought chaos, despair and uncertainty to the lives of thousands (Akiner, 1998). Economic crisis, unemployment, poverty, dislocated civilians, poor living conditions, and various health problems have plagued Kyrgyzstan since independence. Kyrgyzstan's economy found itself in a deep crisis. Industrial

[4] Central Asian Forum titled "University Admission and Development of Testing" was organized in November 5-6, 2009 by CEATM. See www.testing.kg for details. The forum was attended by representatives of MOES of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, representatives of Kyrgyz Government, specialists from international and non-governmental organizations, universities, departments of education, schools and business community.

[5] TV discussion "National Scholarship Testing or Unified State Examination: What is the difference?" – was the Project of Open Kyrgyzstan, of Soros Foundation, Kyrgyzstan held on April 16, 2009. From http://www.open.kg/ru/theme/?theme_id=97

production declined by 63.7 percent from 1990 to 1996, agricultural output declined by 35 percent, and capital investment by 56 percent (Rashid, 2002). In 2001, a World Bank report (cited in Rashid, 2002) indicated that 68 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population lived on less than US$7 a month and the average annual salary was just US$165; the same report estimated a subsistence-level salary at US$295 a year. Between 1990 and 1996, Kyrgyzstan's gross domestic product was almost halved, falling by 47 percent (Rashid, 2002).

A large number of people suffered from the economic collapse. Official sources reported that about 60 thousand people became unemployed in Kyrgyzstan (Abazov, 2004), however, Abazov (2004) believes that real estimates exceed this figure by far. The worsening socio-economic and unstable conditions have caused many people, especially from the highly educated, skilled Russian-speaking population, to leave for Russia or migrate abroad (Allen, 2003; Ibraimov, 2001). The poverty level increased dramatically. Around 30 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population live in (expense based) poverty according to the National Statistics Committee (2009).

Education during the Soviet Era

The Soviets realised that the tempo of societal progress depended on the development of science and education (Holmes, Read & Voskresenskaya, 1995), and Kyrgyzstan achieved a lot of progress in education during the Soviet era (Shamatov, 2005). From its outset, education in the USSR was free and unified. With massive campaigns, the literacy rate in what is now Kyrgyzstan jumped from 16.5 percent in 1926 to 99.8 percent in 1979 (Ibraimov, 2001). Schools were built in the most remote mountain villages and by 1978, there were 1,757 schools with 854,000 students and around 50,000 teachers (Tabyshaliev, 1979)[6].

At the same time, there were problems with Soviet education. All students were exposed to the same centrally designed curriculum, with minor local adaptations to accommodate each Soviet republic (De Young, 2001; Heyneman, 2000). The state controlled educational institutions, teaching appointments, syllabi and textbooks to ensure that all learners were exposed to the same outlook and official knowledge and attitudes (Apple, 1993; Heyneman, 2000). While Soviet education overtly promoted internationalism above nationalist and ethnic identities, many scholars argue that in practice it promoted Russian identity over other national identities within the USSR. A system of education with both Kyrgyz and Russian-medium schools was introduced in Kyrgyzstan early in the Soviet era, and after the late 1950s, parents ostensibly had a choice in the language of instruction for their children. However, socio-economic and ideological pressure to send children to Russian-speaking schools was strong (Korth & Schulter, 2003), and there were key differences between Russian schooling and schooling in local languages. Kyrgyz and Russian schools divided people along linguistic lines which reflected social and economic lines. The reality was that Russian speakers occupied the higher positions in most Soviet institutions (Korth, 2001b). Notably, there was only one Kyrgyz-medium school in the capital Frunze (now Bishkek), where most economic and social opportunities existed. Education in the rural, predominantly Kyrgyz-speaking regions was marginalized and neglected, and pupils in Kyrgyz schools were disadvantaged and underprivileged (Korth, 2001a). As a result many people, including elite Kyrgyz families, preferred Russian school education.

Though Soviet education espoused equality and uniformity, many scholars argue that, contrary to official doctrine, Soviet schooling was never really monolithic or egalitarian. Besides clear disparities between Russian- and Kyrgyz-medium schools, obvious status differences also

[6] According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2009-2010, there were 2134 public schools in Kyrgyzstan, out of which 1379 Kyrgyz-medium schools, 162 Russian-medium schools, 137 Uzbek-medium schools and seven Tajik medium schools, as well as 449 schools that had two or more languages of instruction. There were also 73 private schools.

existed between urban and rural schools (Niyozov, 2001; Sutherland, 1999).[7] Despite high learning standards and an egalitarian approach, success in the Soviet Union was closely related to speaking and acting Russian, resulting in a neglect of, and even distain for, Kyrgyz language, identity and culture (Korth & Schulter, 2003).

Moreover, there were some serious issues with the quality of education in Soviet schools. Anisimov observed, "Until recently, the system of pedagogical education was dominated by the wholesale, information-loaded approach to the training of specialists, and the administrative-command style of leadership. The pedagogical institutions and teacher training schools lacked any real sights or powers with respect to creative questing". Standardised curricula and syllabi also channelled the schooling process primarily into preparing specialists who were not ready to teach effectively and promote upbringing, and that the system failed to cater to national and specific regional characteristics (Anisimov, 1991).

Education in the Post-Soviet Era

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan began experiencing serious problems in the field of education (DeYoung, 2004). Pre-school enrolment declined catastrophically; out of 1,604 pre-school institutions existing in 1991, only 416 remained by 2000 (DeYoung, 2004), and overall pre-school enrolment in Central Asia was only 14 percent in 1999 (Open Society Institute, 2002).[8] About 83.6 percent of the population of Kyrgyzstan completed secondary education in 1993; this decreased to 76.4 percent in 1996, and further to 69 percent in 1999 (DeYoung, 2002).

The gap between the quality of education offered in urban and rural schools became evident. Under an official reform effort called "diversification," new, innovative private schools such as lyceums, gymnasiums, author schools, and schools for gifted children emerged (Holmes, Read & Voskresenskaya, 1995; Open Society Institute, 2002). Many urban schools turned themselves into gymnasia or schools referred to as "new type" to generate extra income[9]. "New type" schools offer advanced coursework in addition to the national curriculum, and extra academic services to students. They generally provide a better and more comprehensive education than "ordinary" state-funded schools. Graduates of these schools have a better chance of entry to prestigious higher education institutions. Overall, there are 73 private schools in Kyrgyzstan (Interview, staff of Ministry of Education and Science, July, 2010). These are mostly located in urban areas with wealthy families who can afford to pay school fees (Open Society Institute, 2002). However, the reality is that only a small fraction of people can afford quality education for their children (EFA, 2000). While providing new opportunities to those who can afford it, this officially endorsed diversification of schools has exacerbated the stratification of Kyrgyz society.

Almost 70 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population and 83 percent of schools are located in rural areas (UNDP report, 2003). Children from rural and mountain schools receive poor quality education. They are also frequently distracted by agricultural work and other family responsibilities (Open Society Institute, 2002). According to official sources, over 2,500 school-

[7] Korth and Schulter (2003) observe that the Russian-medium schools continue offering better education than schools in Kyrgyz and other local languages. The Russian schools continue to enjoy high prestige and are attended by children of different linguistic backgrounds, while Kyrgyz medium schools are attended exclusively by Kyrgyz children.

[8] Significant declines in enrolment in pre-school institutions across Central Asia are related to the increased costs of education, reduced state subsidies for transport and food, and lower family incomes.

[9] To be classified a "new type" school, a school has to have highly qualified, innovative teachers, sufficient facilities and resources, including textbooks and library. DeYoung et al (2006) observe that these schools got even better by untangling the mandated requirements of the government regulations of compulsory curriculum and schooling policies, and attracting money from the international development agencies.

age children dropped out of school in 2001; however, unofficial reports suggest that the actual number far exceeds this figure (DeYoung & Santos, 2004). These dropout rates are a by-product of economic collapse and declining support for the social sector, with primary reasons including poverty, insufficient food, lack of adequate clothing, inability to afford learning materials, and the increasing cost of education. The declining prestige and perceived value of education has also contributed to drop-out rates (Open Society Institute, 2002). According to the National Statistics Committee, 1542 children of ages between 7 and 17 did not attend school in 2008[10]. However, children not attending schools constitute several times more than the official figure indicates according to unofficial sources.

Higher Education

Higher education was free during the former USSR and most students were eligible for state stipends. However, there were very few higher education institutions and only 15% of secondary school graduates were able to attend higher education institutions. After the break-up of the USSR, the number of higher education institutions increased from ten to 50, with over 231,000 students enrolled; 213,500 in public universities and 17,500 at private universities (Brunner & Tillet, 2007).[11] According to official and unofficial sources, anywhere between 50% and 80% of university graduates join the long list of unemployed youth in the country.[12] Increasingly, a large number of graduates, especially with humanities degrees (upto 70%) are becoming more interested in finding a well-paid jobs rather than being employed according to their specialties.

Since independence, Kyrgyzstan adopted new educational policies and one of these policies, the 1992 Law "On Education" allowed for paid educational services and public higher institutions could then charge tuition fees (Brunner & Tillet, 2007). In addition to "budget"[13] or no-fee paying students, they also introduced "contract" or fee-paying[14] students. In 1994, 7.6% of students paid for their education, while in 2005, 76% of university revenues were received from paid educational services and just 24% from the state budget[15]. Thus, student fees now constitute a significantly higher proportion of higher education institution budgets. Even nominally "state" universities today meet only 10-15% of their budget requirements from state transfers (Osorov, 2002). Higher education institutions now compete with each other for students and are constantly trying to expand their enrolments (Reeves, 2003).[16]

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[10] National Statistics Committee report, Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan, 2008.

[11] The percentage of secondary school graduates who get admission in higher education institutions is very high. In 2000-2002, approximately 70% of school graduates were enrolled in higher education institutions. The number of students increased from 141 students per 10 000 of the population in 1995 to 426 students per 10 000 in the 2004-2005 academic year (Brunner & Tillet, 2007).

[12] Unfortunately, higher education institutions do not collect systematic data on the employment of their graduates (Brunner & Tillet, 2007). They simply do not pay attention to employment issues as their graduates.

[13] Budget students receive National Scholarship as a financial grant provided by the government to a particular individual in specialty. These specialties are determined by the government as preparing specialists of priority areas for the country. Amount and number of grants according to universities and specialties are determined by Government of Kyrgyzstan with recommendations from MOES.

[14] Higher education institutions themselves can determine the number of paying (contract) students but it has to be approved by the Ministry of Education.

[15] Tuition fees in higher education institutions of Kyrgyzstan vary. Some universities charge low tuition fees to attract students as an additional source of revenue, but in 2009 the Ministry of education has established a base fee threshold of 15 000 Kyrgyz som per year for day-students and 13 000 Kyrgyz som for part-time students in public institutions. Tuition fees in private universities are nearly 25% higher than in public ones, but some of the more prestigious institutions charge higher fees; for example the American University charges USD 2 000 a year (about KGS 80 000).

[16] There has been rapid shift towards elevating the status of institutes, colleges and technical schools into universities so that they can open new specialities which are popular and can generate profits for the universities. These institutions open market-oriented, fee-paying course specialties in haste without sufficient resources, offering expensive but poor-quality education and graduating inadequately trained specialists (Beshimov, 2001).

In addition to the large number of institutions and their programmes, there remain issues of quality control and programme duplication by the various institutions. Over 40 higher education institutions provide education in economics and approximately 10 prepare future lawyers.[17]

The Policy Rationale for Establishing the Testing Centre

While higher education was free of charge during the former USSR, there were a small number of higher education institutions and only a small fraction of school graduates were able to enter universities. During the USSR and early years of independence, each higher education institution in Kyrgyzstan selected students for enrolment using its own entrance examination. There was no standardized entrance test or examination across Kyrgyzstan. There was a fierce competition for the university entrance, and as each university had conducted their own entrance examinations, there was an opportunity for corruption during entrance examinations. Existing entrance examinations, which included oral questions and writing pre-prepared essays, subjectively assessed factual knowledge and memorization skills, and were affected by nepotism, favouritism, corruption, and a lack of transparency. Results could be manipulated and changed. Moreover, assessment was not used for the improvement of quality of teaching at all. There was no emphasis on achieving equity, because it was merit-based, thus whoever would get high marks, would be enrolled at higher education institutions. Those who had connections or could offer bribes were in strong positions to secure enrolment, and those from rural areas and poorer backgrounds were disadvantaged (Shamatov, 2005). Additionally, despite a long tradition of relative homogeneity in school curricula during the USSR, serious inequities now exist with regard to access to resources and quality education in the country. Wealth and personal connections replaced merit as the essential prerequisites to enrollment to most universities with state scholarship funding.

In 2002, the Minister of Education called for a major reform to change the admission tests for higher education institutions and initiate national testing in Kyrgyzstan.[18] This was done with the help of the American Councils for Collaboration in Education and Language Study (ACCELS) and the financial support of USAID (Drummond & DeYoung, 2004). In 2004, the National Scholarship Test (NST) project also created an independent testing organization, the Centre for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM), which took over the development and administration of NST in Kyrgyzstan.

The objectives of the NST are:

1. to design quality testing instruments, capable of discriminating between university applicants for the allocation of government scholarships for higher education;
2. to create an adequate measurement tool meeting all modern requirements and designed specifically for Kyrgyzstan;
3. to apply a unified measurement scale to all test-takers throughout the country;
4. to combat corruption in higher education through the provision of fair and objective high stakes, norm-referenced test to determine scholarship placement; and
5. to promote wide and fair access to higher education through the development of a transparent enrolment system[19]

[17] According to the UNESCO (2005), in 2003, out of over 26,000 graduates, 23% were in the field of education, while 45% studied social science, business and law; 7% graduated in science, 11% in the field of engineering, manufacturing and construction, and 1% in agriculture.

[18] See Drummond and DeYoung (2004) for a detailed discussion about establishment of national testing in Kyrgyzstan.

[19] The Center for Assessment in Education and Teaching Methods, http://www.testing.kg/en/testing/

"The main goal of NST is to provide equal access to the higher educational institutions based on the results of the transparent, honest and independent testing. The NST measures the ability of school graduates to study in University" (CEATM website) Thus, the CEATM mainly aims to conduct fair and transparent student assessment, and achievement of equity.

The introduction of NST is associated with Kamila Sharshekeeva, Minister of Education in 2002. Sharshekeeva sought help from external agents, notably USAID, and initial meetings with foreign consultants led to the first ever brain storming sessions among various ministry officials, donor agency representatives, and higher education administrators to identify and discuss problems in the educational system of Kyrgyzstan (DeYoung 2004). These meetings generated list of problems and working groups to address them. Sharshekeeva proposed a series of educational reforms plans in four specific areas 1) general management; 2) organizational structure of the Ministry of Education; 3) school management and pedagogical training; and 4) higher education (DeYoung, 2004).

Kamila Sharshekeeva started with reform in the admission procedures of higher education institutions. She was very dissatisfied with the low level examinations and corruption during university admission. When she was working at American University in Kyrgyzstan (AUK, now American University in Central Asia), she learned about the necessity of changing university admission procedures. She observed that entrance examinations of AUK were very good quality as they were inspired by Educational Testing Service (ETS, see http://www.ets.org/). She said:

> When we used similar test, it was great. It was very objective indicator of applicants' knowledge and ability. For example, we could detect very well applicants' listening or writing skills of English. I thought why we don't use these types of tests in our university admission exams. We needed to conduct such a test which would not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their social or ethnic background, gender, race or religion. Prior to this only urban students and mostly children of wealthier families were entering budget places of university. So, I decided that we should develop our Kyrgyz *SAT*". (Interview, July 13, 2010).

John Clark (who was advisor to Sharshekeeva) believes that the NST reform has been a success because it was a right moment for this reform as President Askar Akaev was willing to introduce changes to all spheres including education. Todd Drummond said, "We, foreigners were like cheerleaders only. But it was the local person, Kamila Sharshekeeva, who was vital in this reform. She broke through all the hurdles between her and the President, all these intermediaries, and then she was able to work together with the President. Thus, this reform was successful!" (Interview, August 9, 2010). Akaev issued a decree about the National Scholarship Test, and in 2002 the first NST was conducted. The idea of NST succeeded because there was a political will and support. John Clark considers NST "as one of the best reform initiatives of USAID and entire US government in Kyrgyzstan." Kamila Sharshekeeva also believes that the project was successful because the President of the country was in favor of the test idea being highly educated and committed to education.

After Akaev issued a decree, it was a time to implement the project. This initial period was very difficult because of the short deadline to prepare the test for 2002. At the beginning, trainings were organized for test developers. Then, there was a trip to US during which the test developers were able to get in-depth training.

Then, ACCELS representatives began raising public awareness about the new initiative and its implications. School administrators and teachers were informed about the initiative through seminars and roundtables. Discussions with the school teachers were mostly positive, as Todd Drummond reported, "We tried to explain what NST would be about. They said, 'okay, go

ahead', but I don't think they really trusted that the project would succeed" (Interview, Todd Drummond, August 9, 2010).

Many university rectors were antagonistic about NST. Kamila Sharshekeeva said "the rectors did not want to give up their *kormushka* [*literally* a "feeder", significant amounts of income generated from the illegal sale of government scholarships]. In independent testing they could do nothing". University rectors were interested in returning the desired income-generation mechanism of university admissions to the universities and aggressively opposed the creation NST.

Later, when Sharshekeeva was removed from MOES position, the ministers who followed her did not support independent testing.[20] In fact, all future ministers of education were against, except two. Only two future ministers were not against NST, because according to Ms Sharshekeeva, "they had good relations with (her)." Sharshekeeva's immediate successor was against independent testing from the beginning, wanting to reserve testing and access to the database of test items and NST scores solely for the Ministry. This situation is hardly surprising, since the ministers are normally appointed from the pool of university rectors, who tended to benefit from the existing system. The NST and ACCELS faced opposition from within the Ministry of Education and from university rectors who aggressively criticized CEATM. University rectors were openly antagonistic from the very beginning, and meetings and roundtables with them were far from pleasant. Todd Drummond stated: "When we had roundtables at the ministry, for example, the rectors were very antagonistic. They were not so openly against me, but they really gave a hard time to our local staff. Sometimes they would even threaten some of my staff members physically" (Interview, August 9, 2010). Todd Drummond summarized the situation as follows,

> Post-Kamilla MOE administrations were always interested in "nationalizing testing" (that is, the MOES taking over the testing function) which led to strained, not cooperative relations. The key political point was, is now, and will be, "independence vs. state run testing." One Minister in particular set us back many years in regard to cooperation. In other words, the battle over the money and who owns the database has always been the biggest issue. Post-Kamilla MOES has always had to "find fault: with something, they couldn't just come out and say "we want control of the fees and the databases" - though it has been clear in many instances that this was the real issue. (Email communication, Thursday, 9 July, 2009)

When selecting the assessment instrument for the first NST in 2002, the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan hoped to ensure *equality of access* to higher education and *support for rural youth*. The NST aims to achieve objective, merit-based selection by testing knowledge and skills of secondary school graduates applying for government scholarships to study in higher educational institutions.[21] By combating corruption, nepotism and favouritism, the NST was also designed to enable students from poorer areas to have fair chance to secure budget places at universities.

Though not an explicit goal, it was also hoped that NST would drive overall educational reform in Kyrgyzstan. Teaching and learning in the majority of secondary schools in Kyrgyzstan are oriented towards rote memorization and recall of facts, rather than the development of skills and competencies. The NST tests skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and application of knowledge in a real life situation. By introducing these concepts in testing, it was hoped that the

[20] Sharshekeeva feels happy that she was able to "give" NST to an independent testing organization before she was removed from her post as Minister of Education.

[21] The Kyrgyz government allocates over 5000 scholarships (budget places at public universities) which are distributed on the basis of the applicants' NST scores. Government subsidizes 15 000 som for each budget place to university.

NST would positively influence teaching and learning processes. The Minister of Education hoped that "new methods would become slowly institutionalized, and the challenge of finally motivating teachers to change their styles would be resolved" (Drummond & DeYoung, 2004, p.230). By introducing education reform through objective testing, it was ambitiously hoped that the NST would have a domino effect and result in reforms in areas such as setting internationally competitive national standards and benchmarks, curriculum and textbook development, teacher training, and effective assessment.

NST was ultimately approved within this policy environment and next section describes legal and institutional arrangements.

2. Legal and institutional arrangements

An important part of any reform in education is the appropriate legal base and arrangements. CEATM staff members believe that all necessary conditions and legal regulations have been created for the successful implementation of the Project. The NST is strictly conducted in accordance with Kyrgyz legislation and is now supported by the Government of Kyrgyzstan.

The NST has been conducted since 2002, under a decree of the President of Kyrgyzstan. In 2003, the President issued another decree which was more detailed, and called for monitoring the enrolment process at institutions of higher education by the NGO community. On March 30, 2004, the President of Kyrgyzstan issued a further decree, No. 114, "On further development of the process of awarding state educational grants, conducting the National Scholarship Test and enrolment in higher education institutions", in which the newly created Independent Testing Organization (ITO) Centre for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM) was commissioned to conduct the NST in partnership with the American Councils for International Education in 2004-2005 and onwards.

Decree 404 of the Government of Kyrgyzstan from June 2, 2006 provides regulations on the NST (See appendix A and B). It states that NST is conducted with an aim to distinguish the strongest and most prepared candidates for studying at higher education institutions, and for choosing them for state-funded budget places. Citizens of Kyrgyzstan with secondary education or secondary vocational education can participate in NST, while citizens with higher education diplomas or already studying at higher educational institutions are not allowed to take NST. Foreign citizens can participate in NST to compete for state-funded budget places if they are from countries which have inter-governmental agreements with Kyrgyzstan on budget places. Testing procedures are conducted transparently with information in mass media.

Each year, the MOES issues an annual decree on which institution will conduct the NST, but this announcement occurs late in the process. Previously the test items would be piloted in February and there was plenty of time for reviewing the quality of test items, and piloting was done primarily on 1st year university students in Bishkek. However, now, theMOES announces that CEATM can conduct the NST each year in February, and tests items have to be ready in March as they are piloted in April. Thus, CEATM does not have much time to improve test items or other aspects of NST (Meerim Kadyrova, interview July 14, 2010). Todd Drummond believes that the annual delay with the NST announcement is due to fact that the MOES works "are mostly busy with political activities such as preparation and participation in elections." But each year, there are people and organizations who want to take over NST. In 2010, MOES started organizing tender for the right to conduct NST, and only CEATM participated because other institutions did not have capacity and expertise for conducting NST. It is definitely a good thing

to open up the process and ensure that the best institution gets the bid, but in current scenario there is no alternative to CEATM with its capacity to conduct good quality tests.[22]

CEATM bargains with the MOES about the requirements of registration. Registration for the main test in 2010 was 220 som[23] with an additional charge of 220 som for each subject test. "The fee used to be 200 som before. We wanted to raise the fee upto 300 som, but living condition of people is very low. MOES wants us to reduce the cost of test fee. Therefore, we negotiated with MOES that it would be 220 som. At the same time, we also had a deal with MOES and now test-takers take subject tests, so it is good for us. Plus, 50% for contract-based (fee-paying) students are also enrolled on the basis of NST scores, which is again good for us. It will increase the number of people who take NST[24]" (Meerim Kadyrova, interview July 14, 2010).

Responsibilities of the independent testing service

The MOES selects an independent testing service to conduct the NST. CEATM won the bid in 2010 and it has the following responsibilities. First, MOES and CEATM sign a contract, and according to which CEATM is responsible for developing test items including maintaining confidentiality of test items, providing information on preparation of procedures of registration and testing, conducting regional seminars and trainings for personnel responsible for registration and overseeing tests, providing material, technical and methodological support for registration and testing procedures, conducting objective and transparent tests, and maintaining confidential and valid analysis of test results within time period set by the ministry. After completion of NST, CEATM provides the MOES with report on NST results. CEATM and MOES staff members do not have right to share the NST results without students' consent. Information on NST scores of candidates is made available only at the request of the grant committee of the university where the applicant has submitted his or her documents.

CEATM keeps all documents of applicants' NST results and information on admittance to universities in archive, and provides copies of the applicants' documents to their respective universities. CEATM is also responsible for conducting monitoring of grant winning students to assess the quality of NST and identify means of improvement. In this regard, CEATM has the right to request universities to present them with information on both grant winning and other students to conduct comparative analysis. CEATM has the right to annul the NST results if the test is leaked or if candidates violate rules of NST or provide false documents or information.

Responsibilities of MOES

Based on a contract between them, the MOES works with the independent testing service (in this case with CEATM) to publicize, administer and oversee the NST. Specifically, the Ministry provides CEATM with normative documents. It also provides information to the public on the time and place of conducting NST, specialties of grants and distribution of number of grants to

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[22] From 2008, MOES issued a new decree from February 22, 2008 # 86/1 "On Independent Testing Service". See Appendix C. This decree calls that National Scholarship Testing can be conducted by any independent testing service which wins tender organized by MOES. But only CEATM participated in those tenders (bids), because there were no any strong alternatives capable of conducting quality tests, according to Meerim Kadyrova of CEATM.

[23] 1 USD is equivalent to 46.3 Kyrgyz som as of August, 2010. Thus, 220 Kyrgyz som is approximately 4.7 US dollars.

[24] As NST is not compulsory test for all graduating students, but it is optional and those who want to compete for state-sponsored budget places at universities only take NST as a rule. Approximately, less than 50 % of graduating students normally take NST every year. If more students take NST, CEATM could earn more money from the fees for taking NST. According to CEATM staff member, 76 thousand students graduated from schools in Kyrgyzstan and 30 thousand and 210 applicants took part in NST in 2010. Most applicants took subject test in History (15627), then biology (6364), chemistry (4602), physics (4876), English (4467) and finally German (170).

universities, on categories of applicants, registration locations, rules and regulations of NST and related information via the mass media and through local education departments.

The MOES also prepares and approves a range of specialties at universities which require subject tests of NST, in addition to the main NST test, and also approves the range of university specialties which require internal examinations (arts, physical training, military education and others). The MOES also assists with registering candidates and conducting NST, according to the contract signed between them. The MOES prepares and approves a list of observers from international and non-government organizations and the mass media to observe the procedure of testing and admittance of candidates to higher education institutions. Taking into consideration the general trend of knowledge of candidates, the MOES also establishes the cut-off score for eligibility to compete in the scholarship competition for budget places).

Tests

The NST is administered as a standardized multiple-choice test. It is an aptitude test[25] that examines general academic knowledge, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and the ability to apply gained academic knowledge in practical situations. Two types of tests are used in NST: main and subject tests, and they are assessed separately. The main test is compulsory and assesses general mathematical knowledge, verbal-logical skills and grammar skills, and consists of five sections - numeracy, reading comprehension, analogies, sentence completion, and practical grammar.[26] There are also subject tests which assess knowledge levels in chemistry, biology, and a foreign language (English or German). These tests are conducted for those candidates who want to apply for certain specialties which require additional test. In 2010, due to continuous criticism and complaints about NST not being closely linked to school programmes, new subjects were added to NST. In 2010 to improve mechanisms to support applicants' selection for universities, the MOES included subject tests in Physics, History of Kyrgyzstan and World History.

The NST test items are prepared thoroughly and systematically by experienced test specialists. Test items include questions for higher order thinking according to Bloom's taxonomy[27] and they measure students' deeper thinking, analysis and logical reasoning. After feedback is collected from a broad sector of the teaching community, NST tests are constructed with a realistic view of what would be fair to all examinees across urban, rural, and Russian, Uzbek and Kyrgyz language schools. Throughout the test development process, tight security is maintained to protect the integrity of the test. All test items undergo extensive peer review and revision and the test is reworked before pre-testing them. The pre-test is then conducted, revealing the quality of test items, level of difficulty and efficacy of items to discriminate strong students from weak ones. On the basis of pre-test results, test items are sent to the item bank, where they are revised or discarded.

Registration

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[25] Aptitude tests measure general scholastic skills and determine ability to apply mastered knowledge in practical ways. Aptitude tests have predictive value. Very bright and gifted students can perform exceptionally well on aptitude tests, even if their school performance has not been good.

[26] As every assessment method, testing has its own limitations. One of the major limitations is that the test does not measure speaking skills of the students which is a serious problem for the specialties of higher education related to local and foreign languages. Language specialists complain that many applicants who get high scores and enter language departments of universities have difficulties in speaking.

[27] Benjamin Bloom was an American educational psychologist who made contributions to the classifications of educational objectives. In Kyrgyzstan, Bloom's theories, especially his taxonomy of learning objectives have become increasingly popular and widely used since the break-up of the USSR as they are introduced by different international development agencies, including Soros Foundation in Kyrgyzstan through its Critical Thinking initiatives.

The NST registration procedure is developed by CEATM and is shared with students via mass media[28], regional education offices and school administrators. Those who are not registered on time, can register no later than one week before the NST starts, and can take NST in Bishkek in a time period jointly set by CEATM and the MOES. False information provided by candidates during registration will lead to penalty and disqualification. The registration fee is established by CEATM in agreement with the required government authority responsible for state regulation of cost estimation, depending on the factual expenditure for conducting NST. Registration fees are not returned to the candidates in case of rule violations or non participation.

NST is conducted in accordance with regulations set by CEATM, and are distributed to candidates distributed during or after registration. Applicants receive the booklet "Preparation for NST" in Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek which contains information about how to prepare for the test, as well as sample test tasks for each section and rules of test procedures. Before NST, representatives of CEATM provide instructions to candidates on regulations and rules of conduct. If a candidate violates the rules during the test, then he or she is cautioned, but repeated rule violation may result in expulsion from the test under protocol signed by all administrative group members. Candidates who are late for the NST will be allowed to take test but without additional time. Candidates who cannot take NST because of serious reasons such as (a) being outside the country attending an educational programme; (b) participating in sports events at national and international levels; and (c) health conditions, can take NST on dates jointly set by CEATM and the MOES.

NST Certificates

Candidates are issued official certificates with their test results by CEATM. These official documents have protection from fraud (false copies), and are presented to candidates with proper identification, in locations identified by CEATM. If a certificate is lost, CEATM issues the candidate a replacement document with the NST score result following an application and payment for the copy.

If there is a complaint about the violation of the procedure of admission, a candidate can appeal to the department of rights and appellation procedures or regional departments of MOES. A candidate can submit a written application to CEATM during 3 days from the day of NST. If the violation is confirmed, then CEATM provides conditions for conducting repeat tests during one week from the date of application is submitted. In repeated NST, observers from the MOES can be present.

In 2010, 5705 grants (budget places) were allocated, from which 745 are financed by different ministries (MIA - 230, Ministry of Health - 220, State agency of culture - 175, Ministry of defense - 120); and 238 grants are allocated for realization of intern-governmental agreements and enrolment of ethnic Kyrgyz living aboard. 50 grants are set for those who score top 50 points in NST and get Golden certificates.[29] Thus, amongst 4672 remaining grants, 40% are for technical, engineer and technological specialties, 50% for teaching specialties, 10% for humanities, social-economic specialties and specialties of tourism and ecology - 10%.

[28] In 2010, national newspaper of teachers Kutbilim started publishing detailed information about National Scholarship Tests because of a large number of requests from parents and students.

[29] Applicants who win 1st place in national Olympiads (competitions amongst school students in different subjects) or award winners of international Olympiads in specialties of science, humanities, social-economic, medical, agricultural, technical fields, and their Olympiad subjects matching with the specialty they are applying, also enter budget places without competition.

In 2010, NST was conducted in 78 test centres across Kyrgyzstan[30]. According to CEATM staff member, 76 thousand students graduated from schools in Kyrgyzstan and 30 thousand and 210 applicants took part in NST in 2010. After NST was completed in 2010, the answers are scanned and saved in disks and then entered into database. Two keys are given to state agency of prevention of corruption and MOES. Only they can open the database but only with the presence of CEATM staff. This is being done to avoid falsification of test results. Each candidate's answers are entered into computer, which calculate the score. Todd Drummond stated:

> When we first established NST, the Ministry wanted something sophisticated. They wanted to use black box and then computerize it so that it will be very objective in their view. So, it would be computer who would decide who goes to which university. But we made it very simple. It is a transparent system. We decided to give certificates and allowed students to choose their universities. The students were given talons (certificates) which they would through to their desired places of budget at universities (Interview, August 9, 2010).

Quota Categories

Prior to the establishment of NST, students at schools serving isolated and impoverished communities in villages and remote mountain areas rarely had opportunities to compete for budget places at universities. By introducing the NST the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan hoped to provide "equality of access" to higher education and support youth from rural and mountain contexts to compete for state-sponsored (budget) places at higher education institutions. In 2004, a quota system was introduced to address uneven living conditions and education levels and to make sure that state scholarships are distributed based on proportional representation from all regions of the country.[31] According to a specialist from CEATM, there were four quota categories in 2007: Bishkek schools, oblast center and town schools, and village schools, and mountain area schools. In 2010, two more quota categories were added. They were: (1) *bonus (privileged)* and (2) *purposeful (target)* categories. "Bonus" candidates are those who were physically disabled or those who suffered during tragic political events in spring and summer of 2010[32]. In addition, due to increasing shortage of teachers, it was decided to enrol candidates in budget places under the special tri-party agreements between university, local village government and individual. Under this agreement, 8 universities of Kyrgyzstan were identified to which "target" admission of applicants for teaching specialties was proposed. In this competition, applicants could apply to a budget place, but they should score above the passing grade of NST, and also they should have "direction letter" from district education department office about vacancy for teaching position at school. District education department which gives "directive letter" is responsible for finding a job placement of applicant upon graduation.

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[30] Test centers are established in schools of Kyrgyzstan. The main requirements for test centers are such that they have to be large schools which can accommodate a large number of test-takers and also the school should be easily accessible to test-takers from different other neighbouring villages. The schools in return are not paid for the use of their facilities, but it is considered to be contribution of MOES and school itself for the education development in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, willingness of the school administrators for allowing their schools to be used as test center is very important.

[31] Depending on the number of students who take tests according to these categories, percentages are calculated and taken into account while distributing grant scholarships. For example, if 20 percent of the students are from mount areas, then around 20 percept of grants are awarded to students from mountain schools.

[32] Under the decree of the Interim Government of Kyrgyzstan from June 10, 2010 on distribution of grant places based on NST scores, a special State Grant Committee was formed under the MOES. It included MOES Kanat Sadykov, stat-secretary of MOES Akhunjan Abdrashov, deputy minister Boris Kubaev, deputy ministry Irina Karamushkina, deputy chair of education of Interim Government Marat Usenaliev, members of state committee on coordination of social support for the sufferers of the April events, as well as representatives of the civil society. In total, 140 grant places are planned for the children of those who suffered in the events of spring and summer of 2010.

Moreover, 50 top scoring NST examinees are eligible for Golden Certificates which allow them to enter any budget place at any public university of Kyrgyzstan without competition.[33] Special committee is formed under the ministry to look at this issue.

Grant Distribution

Grant distribution is the most critical component of the NST effort to make higher education more equitably accessible.[34] Applicants with high marks in NST receive certificates which allow them to compete for budget places against other high performing students from the same categories. Students who score above the minimum mandatory cut-off NST score are eligible to compete in the scholarship competition. Cut-off NST scores for 2010-2011 was 105 and 60 in subject tests[35]. More than 15 thousand students could participate in competitions for budget and contract bases in 2010. The highest scoring students within the four demographic quotas are then awarded scholarships.[36] These candidates compete with other candidates from the same category, and the winners are awarded scholarships to study at a university according to the speciality they chose. Thus, the quota system ensures proportional representation of scholarship winners from all regions of the country.

Applicants enter their scores for competition for budget places at different universities according to their choice. The NST quota system then comes into play. For example, if a university has 80 scholarship places available for and receives 400 applicants (100 village students, 100 mountain students, 100 Bishkek students, 100 town students), then each quota category is awarded 20 scholarships; the twenty highest scoring applicants from each category will be offered a scholarship.

With an aim to conduct objective and transparent selection of candidates for higher education institutions on the basis of NST results, grant admission committees are formed which include rector of university, representatives of central and regional educational offices, and representatives from each department of university. Grant admission committee's chair is appointed by the rector of university. This committee makes admission decisions for students in all departments. Grant admission committee analyzes talons with candidates NST scores and provide transparency of competition for grants. On daily bases, grant admission committee puts for public viewing the registered numbers and their ranked scores according to each category. The candidates get information about the number of people applied, their scores, identification numbers so that candidates know how many people are competing. Thus,

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[33] On July 8, President of Kyrgyzstan, Roza Otunbaeva attended event for the golden certificate winners, 52 students (not 50 as originally planned) were awarded golden certificates in 2010. These candidates were also awarded 4000 som as bonus.

[34] The NST is a high-stakes test which serves as the sole selection instrument for the distribution of about 5000 state scholarships funded from the Kyrgyzstan's state budget for study at state institutions of higher education. However, in 2009, tuition fees to study at universities increased sharply (the minimum was increased from 3,000 to 15,000 Kyrgyz som) and this has made the competition for state scholarship even stronger as the stakes of the NST became higher.

[35] In the summer of 2010, there was an issue with applicants applying for budget places because most candidates feared to apply to universities after tragic events in Kyrgyzstan in spring and summer of 2010. As a result, many budget places at universities were not distributed. Thus, in some universities, cut-off NST score was reduced by MOES to 95 points of NST. From http://www.24.kg/community/79356-v-stolice-kyrgyzstana-u-zdaniya-municipaliteta.html

[36] Distribution of grants on NST results is conducted through a competitive process. Each examinee receives a score certificate from the CEATM with five (2 to contract based and 3 for budget based university places) tear-off "talons" (tickets) to apply to the university and major of their choice. Talons are color-coded according to quota category. The talons are tracked by ID number, not name, and are placed into sealed boxes during enrollment registration. Upon the completion of registration, the sealed boxes are opened and the highest scoring examinees, according to the demographic quotas, are awarded scholarships.

candidates can get information on regular basis about the competition, and also know about their own rating.

During this process of allocating grants, there are two and sometimes three rounds. Two or Three Rounds procedure enables an applicant to participate in more than one competition and in more than one university. Third Round normally takes place with the permission of MOES, and applicant shows the certificate itself[37]. List of applicants who are enlisted for budget places are then sent to CEATM for the confirmation of their NST results. Each university is required to openly announce how many budget places, and how many enrolled after Round One, and then after Round Two and so on. However, there might be issues in this procedure and universities may not openly declare about the procedure and the remaining places, and thus many candidates start worrying and then elements of corruption may cripple in. Besides, during registration process the university representatives who register documents may also impact the choice of candidates by providing wrong and misleading advise sometimes, for example, they may hint that the competition for particular specialty is very strong, and thus the candidate who is applying may not get a chance to win grant, and it is better for him or her to apply to another department. They may do so in order to create more favorable conditions for the candidates they support.

With an aim of monitoring transparent, open, and objective selection of candidates for budget places, a committee of independent observers is established in accordance with the decree of Government of Kyrgyzstan from June 2, 2006, # 404. MOES forms and approves a list of independent observers who monitor the admission procedure from amongst representatives of international and non-governmental organizations, mass media, administration of President's Office, administration of prime-minister's office and so on. Number of observers in each university should not exceed 10 people. Independent observers are provided with access to rooms where boxes for throwing certificate/ talons are placed, to meetings of grant admission committee, and right to monitor all procedures beginning from collection of certificates to preparing list of candidates recommended for admission in higher education institutions. Independent observers, however, cannot directly participate in the work of grant admission committee, commit actions which may inhibit the work of the grant admission committee or participate or interfere in the process of decision making of the grant admission committee.

A list of independent observers to eliminate elements of corruption during admission procedure is approved by MOES. In 2010, a list of independent observers included representatives of ombudsmen office, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Service of National Security. MOES representative Evgenia Chubukova stated that long before the admission campaign, a list of independent observers is prepared. According to Chubukova, the most active were the representatives of ombudsman who worked almost in each university of Bishkek. But representatives of MIA were the least active. Observers are volunteers (are not paid) and unfortunately they usually work actively in Phase 1 only and after that they become less active.

The NST Scores and Impact

The NST has been conducted over the last nine years. During this time, many young men and women have benefited from the test. Through its independent and objective testing, the test identifies strong students and, through its quota system, the test increases access to higher

[37] However, Four Rounds were conducted because of the tragic events in spring and summer of 2010 in Kyrgyzstan many students could not submit their documents on time. The Fourth Round was conducted from August 2 to 16, 2010. The deadline was further extended till August 25th as some budget places in several universities still remained unutilized. http://kg.akipress.org/news:251861

education to the strongest candidates regardless their geographic and social background[38]. To a great extent, corruption in admission procedures has also been minimized. From 2002 to 2009, 217,061 school graduates have taken NST and over 39,000 of them were awarded with state scholarships to study at higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan. In 2009, 33,579 students took the NST and 4,928 of them were enrolled in grant places at universities.[39] Table below illustrates the statistics of number of students who took the NST and who won grants in 2009 according to the four quota categories.

Table 1: Number of students who took the NST and who won grants in 2009

Quota Categories	Sts took test	Students won grants
Village (rural)	16,784 (50.4%)	2,573 (52.7%)
Mountain	4,860 (14.9%)	922 (19.1%)
Oblast Center and Town	5,064 (15.5%)	689 (14.3%)
Bishkek	6,526 (19.2%)	689 (13.9%)
Total	**33,579**	**4,928**

The table 1 shows that a great majority of students who take NST and win grants come from villages. This reflects the proportional representation of the geographic locations of schools too: majority of schools in Kyrgyzstan are located in villages. These results demonstrate that the NST is effective in terms of distributing university grants on more equitable terms. Students from Bishkek schools constituted 19.2% of total number of students who took NST, but only 13.9% of the Bishkek students won grants. This is most likely due to the fact that students from urban schools often choose more prestigious specializations, and turn down scholarships if they are offered scholarships in specializations or universities that they do not want. In these cases, they opt for fee paying education of their choice. There were very few scholarship places available for popular majors such as English, law, economics, and computer science,[40] and there is stiff competition for these places. Rural and mountain students usually enter the least prestigious specialities due to their relatively lower scores than grant winners from urban schools, and are more likely to accept scholarships for any specialization offered to them. Choice for rural students is inevitably rather constrained unless they win scholarships, as only about 13% of places in public institutions are available to scholarship students while 87% are obliged to pay fees.

By 2009, students around the country, particularly students from rural areas, started believing that in NST their knowledge is assessed fairly and that they have opportunities to compete for grants regardless of their schools, origin and social status. In 2009, over 70% of grant recipients

[38] Mairambek Toktorov, "*Jalpy Respublikalyk Testtin Korrupstiyany Toktotuuda Taasiri Zor," – The NST has good impact for reducing corruption,* Newspaper Kutbilim, July 10, 2009. page 7

[39] The CEATM report "Results of National Scholarship Testing and Grant Awarding to Higher Educational Institutions of Kyrgyzstan in 2009". See www.testing.kg

[40] Every year, the government of Kyrgyzstan allocates around budget places based on the needs of the country for different specialists. These days, priority is given to pedagogical specialties as more than half of budget grants are for 'future teachers'. Unfortunately, because of low salaries and limited future opportunities, the teaching profession is in less demand and therefore, those students who can afford to pay tuition fees refuse state grants and choose professions other than teaching. Most students who pay from their own pocket, study management, economics, law and humanitarian sciences, and generally prefer to be enrolled in private universities. Children from low income families have fewer opportunities to enter higher education institutions because of the poor quality of secondary education they receive. For more detailed analysis of low scoring students in NST and how majority of them are able to enter pre-service teacher education specialities due to their low scores, refer to Silova (2009).

were from rural and mountain schools. The following table shows the percentages of rural students who won grants from 2002 to 2008.

Table 2: Results of the national test (ORT)

Year	Number of NST participants	Number of Enrolled students on Grant Places	% of enrolled students from rural students
2002	13 837	5 000	66.0
2003	35 247	5 000	63.9
2004	39 286	5 310	61.5
2005	32 852	5 380	61.8
2006	33 336	5 085	69.0
2007	34 225	4 787	70.8
2008	33 431	4 933	69.7
Total	222 214	35 495	

Source: Centre for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods

Thus, the NST gained a good reputation among these students and their parents:

> Free higher education became a real possibility for gifted, knowledgeable graduates of schools. The old system which served only rich and high officials is over. Nowadays, the task of the school is not only to award a diploma by any means, but to prepare a student who can demonstrate with action the efforts and hard work of his teachers during entrance procedures to higher education institutions, thus raising the prestige of his school. Universities, in their turn, due to the National Scholarship Testing, received prospective specialists with human and intellectual potentials to whom the state can and should invest. Our motherland gained a reputation in international arena as a country which is taking care of its tomorrow.[41]

The results of the NST show that students from rural schools have benefitted from the new system, for example, 70% of grants were awarded to students from village and mountain schools in 2009 indicating at the proportional distribution of grants based on quota categories. However, the quality of each grant place is different because the specialties and universities vary in prestige. Thus, even though the Bishkek students receive the smallest number of budget awards, they usually receive the grants in top departments and universities due to their high NST results. Village and mountain students, while receiving the largest number of grants, usually enter lower prestige universities and faculties because their scores are low and they cannot compete with the top scores of Bishkek students.[42] Moreover, many village students nowadays

[41] This is an extract from an essay by Mars Aliev, a student who was awarded a grant and now is a student of Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University (source www.testing.kg). It is translated from Russian by the author.

[42] Even within universities themselves, there are departments of different repute and prestige. Thus, higher scoring students, usually from urban areas, normally enter the most prestigious departments, while low scoring, mostly from village and mountain schools, enter the remaining departments of far low prestige and repute. For example, at Osh State University, Medical Department is the most prestigious department followed by English language branch of Foreign Language Department, Department of Business and Management and so on. The comparisons of the prestige can also be made according to the contract fees that students in different departments have to pay. At OSU,

apply to regional universities instead of coming to Bishkek, because living in Bishkek is expensive. It is necessary to take proactive measures to help rural students attend urban universities otherwise the gap and stratification will further increase, only small fraction of students in big cities' students keep getting quality education.

Besides, equity issues also exist with regard to Golden Certificates whose winners usually come from private schools or elite Bishkek gymnasia.[43] In 2009, graduates from one gymnasium in Bishkek received 18 out of the 50 Golden Certificates.[44] More research is needed to answer why only selected school students keep getting Golden Certificates. In which universities do these award winners study? What happens after they graduate from universities? Do they serve Kyrgyzstan? It is necessary to think of sending right messages of equity and opportunities to all layers of population, and to *award golden certificates too on the basis of quota categories.*

Variables Affecting NST Scores and Impact
While more equitable access to higher education has been achieved, the results of the NST confirm that the quality of education differs according to geographic location and medium of instruction of schools.

Geographic Location: Students from Bishkek schools score highest, followed by students from oblast center and town schools, followed by those at village schools, and finally by those from mountain schools. In 2007, students from Bishkek scored 135.5, while the students from the oblast center and town schools scored 121.4, village students scored 107.0, and the students from mountain schools scored the lowest - 106.3. These results of 2007 were consistent with previous years' results.

Table 3: Students' average scores according to their school location in 2007

Location of School	Average Score in 2007
Bishkek	135.5
Oblast Center and Town	121.4
Village	107
Mountain area	106.3

There was also a clear disparity of highest performing students according to the *oblasts* (provinces) they represented. Table 3 shows the calculation of those who scored 200 and higher marks in NST in 2009.

Table 4: Number of NST Scores over 2009 according to Oblast

Place	200	210	220	230	240	245

Medical Department – 23 000 som per year, English – 18 000, Business and Management – 18 000, while Department of Pedagogy charges the minimum contract fees – 15 000. Before the sharp increase in contract fees in 2009, the students of the Department of Pedagogy hardly paid 5 000 som per year.

[43] Amaliya Benliyan, "*Luchshiy ball Evgeniy,"* Newspaper Vechernyi Bishkek. Friday, 10 July 2009. N 127 (9795), page 1,2

[44] When specialists of the MoES analyzed the performance of students from gymnasium #61 they found out that teachers from gymnasium participate in the projects of the CEATM where they learn how to develop standardized tests and how to use them in their daily activities in schools. Moreover, these teachers taught their colleagues for test skills.

Chui oblast	67	30	17	7	2	
Yssyk-Kol oblast	41	23	9	6		
Osh oblast	33	9	1	2		
Talas oblast	22	1	2	1		
Jalal-Abad oblast	10	7	2			
Batken oblast	8	3	3			
Naryn oblast	7	2				
Bishkek city	257	200	123	45	9	1
Osh town	29	8	1	2		
Kyrgyzstan	**445**	**275**	**158**	**61**	**11**	**1**

The highest performing students compete to enter the specialities they desire and they have better chances of getting awarded grants. The majority of these high performing students are from Bishkek city and Chui oblast, which is located near Bishkek and has more industrial towns, followed by Yssyk-Kol oblast and Osh oblasts. The least number of high performing students come from more remote oblasts; Naryn, Jalal-Abad and Batken.

Language and Testing: Since the inception of the NST, students who take test in Russian usually score highest, followed by those taking test in Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages (see Table 4)

Table 5: Average scores based on languages that students took NST, 2009

Language	Average Score
Russian	133.2
Kyrgyz	104.4
Uzbek	100.6
National averaged scaled score	114.0

Historically, the Russian-medium schools had enjoyed privileged status in the country, and elite families prefer to send their children to Russian-medium schools, most of which are located in urban areas, especially Bishkek. While efforts have been made to further develop Kyrgyz-medium schools since independence, economic difficulties and lack of effective policies and practices have hampered this process. The majority of Kyrgyz-medium schools are in rural and poor regions of the country, further exacerbating their disadvantage (Shamatov, 2005).

Resources & Teaching Methods: The top performers of the NST are usually from private schools, such as Kyrgyz-Turkish schools[45], elite urban schools in Bishkek and schools which

[45] Many private schools have been established since the break-up of the USSR. The Turkish non-governmental Sebat International Educational Institute established in 1991 has got 14 private high schools in Kyrgyzstan. These Kyrgyz-Turkish high schools offer separate schooling for boys and girls and are located in different cities and towns of Kyrgyzstan. The success of private schools such as Kyrgyz-Turkish schools can be attributed to the following. These schools select best students from other schools after grade 5, charge high tuition fees, offer quality education and are far better resourced. They also have low teacher-student ratio. Students live in dormitories and are provided with additional support in their studies. Their teachers get relatively higher salaries than public school teachers,

receive support of international organizations. These schools offer better quality schooling, are well resourced and their teachers are familiar with innovative teaching[46]. Teachers in rural and mountain schools are not familiar with effective teaching approaches or different testing methods. Most lack professional development opportunities to learn innovative teaching approaches, and as a result, focus on textbook coverage and promote memorization and recall rather than critical thinking and application of knowledge. In many cases, textbooks are the only tools that teachers follow strictly in their practices.

Testing is a learned skill. For example, students from Kyrgyz-Turkish schools sit for tests in their subjects almost every week. This is not the case in rural schools. Often, rural teachers are not equipped to design and conduct tests. A rural school teacher observed, "Most of our students get anxious when they sit in test halls in the district center. This is due to the poor self-esteem of the rural students. Our students normally do not have this kind of experience in their whole life at school".

The disparity in test scores by language and demographics raises serious questions for educators and policymakers in Kyrgyzstan. Urban schools usually have better resources, can afford to invest more in their students, and are better prepared for the type of skills that the NST measures. Teaching and learning in rural and mountain schools remains oriented towards rote memorization and recall of facts rather than skills development or attaining educational outcomes. Thus, while the NST has achieved more equitable access to higher education, it has not had a significant impact on educational methods or results.

Issues of NST

CEATM specialists prepare annual reports of the NST results, as well as recommendations for the education community. During the initial years (in 2003 and 20004), the education authorities used NST results to assess the quality of schools and many local education officials and school administrators were admonished if their NST results were poor. The NST results were used by education authorities to punish schools whose students performed poorly instead of analyzing test results and to provide the needed support for them. A specialist from CEATM commented, "Some district education officials prepared their ranking tables for the schools in their districts and used those schemes to reward and punish, and this is against the principles of NST." There are also reports that education authorities used the NST results to admonish and in some cases to sack administrators of those schools whose students performed poorly in the NST. As a result, there is a pressure for school administrators to choose which students can take tests and which ones cannot so that the average score of the school goes up. According to CEATM, individual results should not serve as an indication of school quality (Todd Drummond, n.d.[47]). There are many factors that play an important role in the students' NST, such as parents' education and their socio-economic background. If parents are more educated, their children tend to perform better in the NST. As a rule, urban parents have higher education than rural parents. If NST results are given too much importance, it could affect the moral of the students from those schools with poor results. Parents would want to send their children to the schools with better results, resulting in strong schools become stronger and weak schools become weaker (Todd Drummond, email communication, July 13, 2009).

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have regular opportunities for professional development, and therefore, they have lower dependency on textbooks, while they use learner-centred methodologies and conduct ICT integrated lessons.

[46] The teachers from urban schools are acquainted with test methodologies because they have access to internet, library, additional materials and more professional development seminars and trainings are available in Bishkek.

[47] Todd Drummond' article "Use of NST results for assessing quality of education: For and against" in CEATM website http://www.testing.kg/files/test/reports/Article%20for%20Mektep%20NI.pdf

The hoped-for collaboration and coordination between CEATM and other institutions did not materialize, and the NST has not served as the catalyst for change that many hoped it would. The next ministers of Education and Science were not in favour of the NST from the very beginning, but they had no other strong alternatives. The new ministers unfortunately have been more interested in "nationalizing testing" with the Ministry of Education taking over the testing function, and this led to strained, not cooperative relations (Todd Drummond, email communication, July 13, 2009).

Some Kyrgyz education officials are active proponents of the idea of shifting from the NST to the Unified State Examination (USE).[48] These officials believe that the NST has had negative impact on education quality and it should be changed. They propose that Kyrgyzstan should follow footsteps of Russia and Kazakhstan where a testing organization under Ministry of Education conducts Unified State Examinations.[49] Ex-deputy minister Gaisha Ibragimova believes that NST was the first assessment tool in the whole post-Soviet context which assesses thinking and real life skills, and that the country got a large number of qualified specialities in the field of assessment because of NST (test developers, consultants, instructors, analytics who do research on assessment and testing and education politicians). According to Ibragimova, Unified State Examination in Russia is facing many issues related to wastage of large amount of money and not being able to meet goals set for it (See Appendix D for detailed descriptions from the forum on education held for TV by Open Kyrgyzstan project, April 16, 2009). USE did not become a powerful weapon to combat corruption, and neither it became an instrument to shape and form state policy on education. She believes that discussions about introducing USE in Kyrgyzstan have re-emerged recently because Russia is giving World Bank 30 million dollars for implementing READ project to support the poorest countries in the field of assessment (i.e. to establish independent testing centers and capacity of assessment), and in addition to countries as Ethiopia, Mozambique and Zambia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan was also included.

The National Testing Centre (NTC) under the Ministry of Education and Science does not seem to have well-qualified specialists on test, technical and financial potentials. Moreover, there are doubts over whether the NTC would be able to conduct tests following the principles of secrecy, reliability and objectivity of its tests and there is no guarantee that the NTC would be independent and free from administrative influences.

There are also obstacles for NST from different individuals who are not able to achieve their aims one way or another. For example, the CEATM staff members mentioned about deputy of Ombudsman who became antagonistic towards CEATM when his son did not get golden certificate. He then began active campaign to discredit NST, independent testing idea and CEATM itself.

The NST also had some unintentional consequences within the education system. When the NST was introduced, it was hoped that students would now be able to demand the quality education that would enable them to win scholarships and get free higher education (Drummond & DeYoung, 2004). However, in many schools, this did not prove enough to produce quality education. Many teachers started focusing on test preparation rather than improving skills and knowledge. As the NST is a high-stakes test and there were cases when school teachers only did NST preparation, to the detriment of their students' overall education. As a representative from

[48] Debates continue about independent versus state-run testing; highlighting turf battles over finances and control over the database of test scores and ultimately, the ability to influence who is awarded state scholarships.

[49] Kamila Sharshekeeva, ex-minister of education stated: "we should learn from USA about testing, but not from Russia and Kazakhstan. Our NST is the best in the region, and of course Russia could also learn from it, but they will be too proud to admit it. The ultimate beneficiaries of NST are common people. When I walk in small towns and villages, people recognize me and than me for NST" (Interview, July 13, 2010).

the Kyrgyz Academy of Education said, "It is pity that there are cases where our school teachers divide a lot of their class time for test preparation."[50] Teachers changed class format and devoted large amounts of class time to test preparation to avoid political and administrative pressure. Some schools stop teaching according to their syllabus and textbooks, and only prepare students for the NTS after winter break.

In the NST, not all students can demonstrate their knowledge and ability because the majority of students are taught the 'rote memorization method'. The NST is designed to test critical and analytical thinking and problem-solving skills. Therefore, many students started taking private tutoring to learn the skills which are tested in the NST.[51] Parents started hiring university professors or other specialists to offer private tutoring to their children. A parent from Osh town says:

> My elder son is a graduate of secondary school in this year. He also participated in the NST test. Now we are waiting for test result. My son prepared for the NST test almost one year. He attended additional classes. We paid money for his *repetitors* (private tutors) from university, so he could learn important skills which are tested in the NST since schoolteachers cannot teach their students on the level so they can get good score from the NST.[52]

Many secondary school students undergo tutoring, because they do not get sufficient test taking skills in schools. This indicates many problems:

- There is a disconnect between what is being taught in many schools and what is being tested in the NST;
- Teachers' inability to teach necessary skills even if it is not their fault;
- Parents' distrust of teaching in schools; and
- Increase of inequity within the education system because not everyone can afford high quality private tutoring (Silova, 2009).

Thus, some argue that test preparation is unavoidable in the market economy[53] but they do not realize that the NST preparation has reinforced existing inequities, with those who can afford quality tutorship being able to access it, and those who cannot remaining without.

It seems the NST was not able to positive influence and initiative broader education reforms in Kyrgyzstan (e.g., as setting internationally competitive national standards and benchmarks, curriculum and textbook development, teacher training, and effective assessment). The NST continues testing skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving and application of knowledge in a real life situation. However, I am also aware that it is unfair to blame one organization (CEATM) for all failures or unintentional negative consequences. Ideally, it is the Ministry of Education should have acted more proactively and coordinate all reform initiatives so that they

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[50] Interview with Kyrgyz Academy of Education official, Bishkek, July 10, 2009

[51] Unfortunately, there are not many well-prepared tutors in rural and mountain areas like urban schools and thus not every parent can afford to pay for their children for additional classes in rural settings. Payment for tutoring is different depending on tutors' competencies and location of schools. The interviews revealed that rural students normally pay from 100 som maximum up to 300 som per hour of tutoring, while urban students pay maximum up to 1000 som. Private tutors are either university teachers or school teachers who have understanding and experience on standardized tests.

[52] Interview with secondary school graduate's parent, June 25, 2009

[53] Even some institutions were involved in private tutoring, and during conversations some openly confronted me and asked what is wrong with offering private tutoring courses by giving examples of TOEFL preparation courses. I attempted to explain that the NST preparation is totally different because the NST was a high-stake test and there were 5000 state scholarships to study at university on budget basis and by offering the NST preparation for selected students, one would be violating the fundamental principle of equal opportunities of those who cannot afford private tutoring courses for one reason or another.

are closely connected and have overarching goals. Moreover, most of the issues raised by the creation, implementation and direct and indirect outcomes of the NTS are related to broader educational issues in Kyrgyzstan. Unfortunately, there is lack of collaboration and joint work among stakeholders who work on education standards, curriculum development, textbook publication, teacher training and re-training, and assessment and evaluation. International organizations also often work on the same education issue without collaborating with each other. As a specialist from Kyrgyz Academy of Education said:

> It is true that there are many international organizations working on education sectors, but the problem is that in most cases they choose education issues and problems for their project themselves without asking the MOES suggestions. Sometimes, they repeat already implemented projects. Unfortunately, the MOES also does not actively suggest educational issues to them.[54]

International organizations involved on education reforms in Kyrgyzstan have often limited success because their activities are not well coordinated. Projects are duplicated and most of them were not institutionalized, resulting in a lack of sustainability (Shamatov, 2010; Steiner-Khamsi et al, 2007). International organizations are involved in small projects for long-term periods with separate reform initiatives, and therefore, fail to implement systemic change (Shamatov, 2010).[55]

CEATM has close relations with MOES and conducts NST by winning tender organized by MOES. However, relations of CEATM with Kyrgyz Academy of Education (KAE) are limited. KAE is responsible for in-service training of school teachers and also for developing educational standards and developing textbooks. Unfortunately, only limited number of staff members of KAE work together with CEATM as test developers, but there is no institutional links. There is also no formal links with pre-service teacher training institutions[56]. With schools, there is a close link while graduates of schools take NST, and thus school administrators, teachers, students and their parents are interested in NST as it is a high-stakes test. Regional education authorities also work closely with MOES and CEATM to inform school administrators and teachers about NST regulations.

National Scholarship Test replaced entrance examinations at the HE institutions to a great extent. Almost all candidates who apply for state-funded budget places should take NST. Only candidates who apply to the following universities and departments: Kyrgyz National Conservatory, National Art Academy, Kyrgyz State Art Institute, Kyrgyz State Construction, Transport and Architecture University's selected departments (Arts, Design, Decorative and Applied art), physical training and sport, are not required to take NST, and they have to take internal examinations at universities. Ministry of Internal Affairs Academy and Bishkek Military School take into consideration NST results but they also conduct their internal exam. Moreover, from 2010, at least 50% of students who apply to contract based education at universities are selected through their NST results.

Unfortunately, there is little or no relationship between NST as external assessment with internal (school based) assessment. Only a small number of private schools use multiple choice tests. Thus, there is no evidence for the influence of introduction of external assessment on the school based assessment.

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[54] Interview with a methodology specialist from Kyrgyz Academy of Education, Bishkek, 25.06.2009

[55] Amaliya Benliyan, "*Grajdanka Gita,"* Newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek, Friday, 28 July, 2008, page 27

[56] Unfortunately, pre-service teacher training in Kyrgyzstan is in very poor shape these days. Pre-service teacher training has been neglected by educational reforms and donor agency involvement as it was considered to be waste of time to work with pre-service student teachers because majority of them do not become teachers upon graduation.

As described above, NST aims to combat corruption, and to a great extent the elements of corruption was minimized during admission to budget places. There are no any situations when the work of CEATM was questioned for integrity (e.g. leaking of tests, information, possible corruption), though Todd Drummond shared that sometimes he hears comments from local people that "now there are elements of corruption because local organization and local people took over conducting NST from ACCELS and now that ACCELS has handed over to CEATM to right to conduct NST" (interview, August 9, 2010). He believes there no proof for that, but it is just a mentality of local people trusting foreigners as "clean from corruption".

However, there were unexpected and unintentional consequences of NST which let to corruptive practices. In 2010, there were 62 cases reports as violations of rules of NST. Two thirds of them were punished for using cell phones, while 20 percept of them were "*kaskaders*" as CEATM staff members termed them, when individuals take NST in place other candidates. As a result, NST results of the candidates who used stunts were annulled. It is widely reported that some students of universities who already took NST previous years attempt to earn money by taking NST in place of new candidates, and they can be paid upto 200 USD for doing stunt. Moreover, there are some individual entrepreneurial people who do business on NST, as they are said to collect test materials from test-takers of previous years, and then conduct test preparation trainings for young men and women, who then do stunts to earn money. Meerim Kadyrova of CEATM stated how they have given names of those stunts to National Security Service of Kyrgyzstan to deal with this issue.

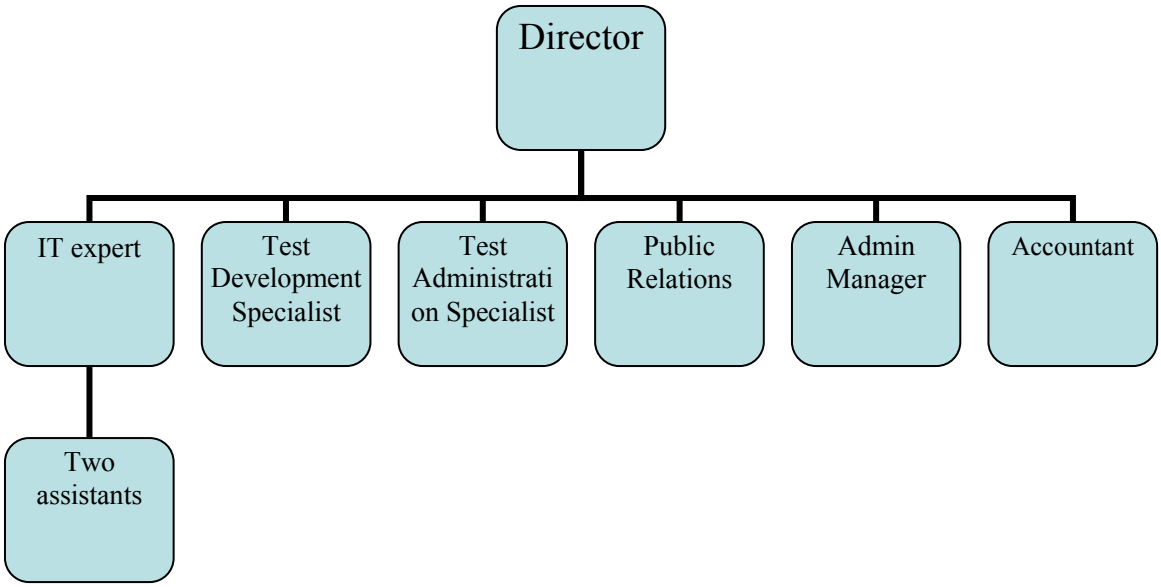
Besides, according to Elen Kulenbekova, a correspondent of independent radio channel Azattyk (http://www.azattyk.org/articleprintview/2104722.html) with the start of university admissions, many teachers begin attempting to make money. She gave examples of how university teachers promise to help candidates and get money from them for helping them to secure budget places, and that Finance Police of Kyrgyzstan opened criminal cases against several teachers this year. Although, legally it is very difficult, they use different tricks, for example, Perizat, a young woman, was not able to enter budget place in First Round even though her NST result was high. She then was thinking of applying for contract place in the Second Round. She cited that some candidates even with very low score of 95 in NST entered budget places, while some people without connections like her could not get into budget place with even 175. Another young woman, Salkyn gave example of those who give money and use connection to enter university. She said, "If you have money, then you can enter university with no problem. There is a saying these days, as because I did not enough money for budget, therefore I entered contract based. Thus, poor people cannot enter budget".

Of course, these are the extreme cases, and few examples, and thus, they cannot overturn the overall successes of NST to combat corruption.

3. Organizational Structure of testing Centres & Governance

CEATM was established in 2004 to design and administer the NST. A major goal is the development of human resources with the skills necessary to construct and administer sophisticated, secure, educational assessment services. The key areas for training are: 1) test item and test development, 2) test analysis. 3) test security, 4) examinee registration, 5) test administration. Trainings are conducted in overall test construction, item weighting, equating, psychometric analysis, scoring and scaling. ACCELS and consultants began training on these subjects in the first two years of the project.

Figure 1: Organizational structure of CEATM



The organizational structure of CEATM is as follows. There are nine employees at CEATM. There is a director of CEATM[57], IT specialist with two assistants, specialists for test development, specialist for test administering, public relations specialist, administrator/manager and accountant[58]. The center is relatively small and there are no different departments. I was informed that the number of staff is sufficient for activities that have to be carried out. All members of the team have a direct effect on achievement of objectives. It seems that the staffing procedures of the CEATM were transparent. The vacancies were announced openly, but snow-ball strategy was also employed to attract strong candidates. The special requirement for professional staff responsible for assessment was that they should have understanding of education matters. Two employees, the director and test developer came from American University in Central Asia and were experienced educators already. Two more candidates came from Bishkek Humanities University. Knowledge of local languages is a requirement and thus the latter two are bilingual and they speak Russian and Kyrgyz. Experiences in assessment and examination were a condition for employment. Prior to joining CEATM, most staff members had negative experience with assessment system in Kyrgyzstan. For example, test administration specialist stated:

> Prior to CEATM, I was working at one of the universities in Bishkek. I had concerns. It was clear that those who had money and connections were able to get budget places. E.g. if there were 20 budget places, 18 would hardly be given via connections, and then two would be sold. System was such and it was difficult to go against the stream. 2001, I had a terrible experience when I was shocked about the system. I was in the admission committee and a disabled child with poor eye sight was taking an exam. He would get

[57] Prior to joining CEATM, the director of CEATM was a co-director of Critical Thinking Laboratory of the Soros Foundation, Kyrgyzstan. The Soros Foundations are a network of foundations, programs, and institutions established and supported by philanthropist George Soros to foster the development of open societies around the world, particularly in the previously Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former USSR. The Soros Foundations have a broad array of programs in education, media and communications, human rights and humanitarian aid, science and medicine, arts and culture, economic restructuring, and legal reform. In the field of education, the Soros Foundation in Kyrgyzstan offers such programs as higher education support, English language, advising centers and scholarships, educational reform, innovative primary education, debate, and critical thinking.

[58] CEATM also has a typist. CEATM shares building with American Councils for International Education: ACTR / ACCELS and therefore, these two organizations share the cost of some employees, e.g. security personnel, cleaning staff and receptionist.

> admission if he got satisfactory mark. But the chairperson ordered me to find "fault" with that child's documents by any means so that he is eliminated (Interview, July 15, 2010).

CEATM staff also got trainings when they joined the centre, many consultants visited CEATM from abroad to provide on job support and consultation. However, some staff members also said that they mostly learned from their own experience and via trial and error. In this regard, they reported that taking part in international test PISA has been invaluable in terms of learning about how to conduct good quality tests. The staff members also learned from reading literature on testing and assessment. Todd Drummond stated that the staff members of CEATM work very hard and had grown tremendously. For example, IT specialist, who was a mathematician originally, learned a lot about testology, psychometrics though his experience. He has been working for 8 years now and knows how to analyze tests. He has got access to database, and Todd believes he needs to be paid well, otherwise, he is in high demand and will be attracted to other lucrative salary paying position. Besides, database is strictly confidential and sensitive and it will be temping for someone to do wrong things if they are not paid well. He learned from consultants, from literature, from experience. He works on quality of test items, and he also does good quality sampling.

CEATM staff members said that they have sufficient number of people, but when they conduct NST, they hire volunteers, part-time employees and assistants for 2-3 months. For example, more than 20 test developers are hired every year for preparing test items. In 2010, for administering tests in 78 test centers in the region, part-time employees are hired.

CEATM has got a governing body consisting of 12 people. This governing body provides CEATM with sound direction, continuity and effective support. It oversees that there is short-term and long-term planning with a strategy for accomplishing the center's goals. It monitors that CEATM has clearly formulated policies wherever necessary to give consistency and order to its operation, and ensures that these policies are understood and implemented properly. Governing body members are nominated by the board members themselves. Initially, Todd Drummond when he was a head of National Testing Initiative, he chose board members himself, and at the same time Ministry of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan nominated 3 people to the board in the first year. Potential board members are proposed and their candidacy is assessed by the members of the board. As Sharshekeeva stated "first of all, they have to be supportive of the idea of independent testing". To become a member of the board one has to be influential person and should have a solid voice in community. He or she should be highly educated and understand the principles of education. Job of a board member is voluntary and considered to be service to education and society of Kyrgyzstan. Governing board is not responsible to anyone, but themselves. Board members are nominated and elected for 3, 4 or 5 years, and the term of service of different members varies, so that there is overlap and continuity in the work of the governing board. In the current governing board, there are only two foreigners, Dan Davidson, director of American Councils for International Education: ACTR / ACCELS and Todd Drummond as ex-director of Testing Center. The rest are prominent people from Kyrgyzstan. Board members meet formally once a year to discuss annual matters, and also meet more regularly as the need requires. They also keep close connection via email and phone communications for immediate consultation and action. CEATM staff normally makes presentations to the Board members during the annual meeting to inform them about the accomplishments and challenges. The presentations will be about the activities of CEATM, tests conducted, political and other issues, financial matters and so on. Almost all board members including Dan Davidson participated actively and many of them made presentations during the Central Asian Forum organized by CEATM in November of 2009.

4. Operations (exams and tests)

CEATM mainly conducts National Scholarship Test, and from 2002 to 2010, it has now conducted NST nine times. Apart from National Scholarship Test, CEATM is involved in conducting tests commissioned by various organizations.

In 2006, CEATM has been commissioned by the Rural Education Project of World Bank in Kyrgyzstan to conduct the assessment for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Shamatov & Sainazarov, forthcoming)[59]. PISA is an international standardized test for comparative assessment of 15-year-old students' skills. Members and partners of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) participate in the PISA competition to assess the comparative quality and condition of their education systems. PISA 2006 focused on student competency in science. In today's fast-progressing globalized, technological world, understanding main scientific concepts and theories and the ability to solve science problems are more important than ever. The decision for Kyrgyzstan to participate in PISA was taken in 2005 by the Minister of Education and Science (MoES) of Kyrgyzstan with encouragement and financial support of the Rural Education Project of World Bank[60]. Stephen Heyneman, long-term WB education consultant stated, "Kyrgyzstan is joining countries all over the world. My recommendation was for Kyrgyzstan to join from the beginning of PISA. About ten years ago, I was saying 'join PISA, join PISA'. I measure the speed of reform in this region by the number of countries taking part in PISA and TIMSS." (Interview, July 10, 2009).

According to a specialist of the MoES, "Everyone was excited to participate and see the results of PISA. It could be a tool to demonstrate the state of education in our country, which area of the education system is not performing well, and how bad or good the system is in comparison with other countries." The REP consultant added, "It was important to know not only where Kyrgyzstan stood, but why we stood where we stood, and what should be done so that we could move forward." The following objectives for Kyrgyzstan's participation in PISA 2006 were identified by the MoES[61]:

- To assess the educational achievement of Kyrgyzstan's students with a modern and international assessment tool;
- To define what place Kyrgyzstan occupies in the world among the other countries on level of preparedness of 15 year old schoolchildren for adult life; and
- To analyze the results of research and propose recommendations and ways of school development and improvement.

Around 6000 students from 201 schools were randomly selected throughout the country. The test was conducted in Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek languages. In addition to the test, a survey was conducted with school children and school administrations.[62]

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[59] About half a million US dollars were spent for conducting PISA competition in Kyrgyzstan (World Bank Education project coordinator).

[60] The Rural Education Project (REP) of the World Bank aims to improve learning and learning conditions in primary and secondary education in Kyrgyzstan. Apart from financially supporting Kyrgyzstan to participate in the comparative assessment of PISA, REP is also implementing a pilot project to introduce Formative and Summative Assessment in selected oblasts of Kyrgyzstan (Talas and Yssyk Kol). Under REP, teachers and school administrations are assessed based on their performance. This promotes the establishment of merit pay based on certain standards and the value-added approach that was recommended by for systems to improve their performance in PISA tests (Briller, 2009).

[61] CEATM, *"Report of International assessment"* <http://www.testing.kg/ru/projects/what/> (June 20, 2009)

[62] CEATM, *Uchimsiya dlya Jizni- Rezultaty mejdunarodnogo sravnitel'nogo issledovaniya fukstional'noi gramotnosti 15-letnikh uchashihsya* PISA-2006 (Bishkek: CEATM, 2008), 12

The PISA 2006 results showed that 15-years old students of Kyrgyzstan performed extremely poorly (Shamatov & Sainazarov, forthcoming). Among the 57 participating countries and economies, Kyrgyzstan took the last place. Among the participating countries and economies, Finland performed highest in science (563 points); while Chinese Taipei (549 points), Finland (548 points), Hong Kong-China (547 points), and Korea (547 points) performed highest in mathematics; and Korea performed highest in reading (556 points). Students of Kyrgyzstan achieved a mean score of 322 points in science, 311 points in mathematics, and 285 points in reading.[63] These are the lowest scores among the participating countries and economies. Even among the participating post-Soviet countries (which included Estonia, Russia and Armenia), Kyrgyzstan's results were poor. Only 13.6 % of Kyrgyzstan 15-year-old students were able to carry out a basic level of tasks in science, 11.7 % - in reading and 11.8 % in math. Over 85% could not score even the basic level of the PISA scale, meaning that a great majority of students could not demonstrate the science competencies that would enable them to participate actively in life situations related to science and technology (Report on PISA assessment results, 2007).

Thus, the PISA 2006 results provided solid evidence on the terrible state of secondary education in Kyrgyzstan. A specialist from the Kyrgyz Academy of Education stated, "On one hand, the PISA result was shameful for us, but on the other, it was very useful because we were able to identify education quality in Kyrgyzstan according to the international requirements. The poor result made all of us seriously think about our education system." (Interview, June 26, 2009).

Different education stakeholders, educators, politicians, parents, and others, discussed and debated the results of PISA in the press and through other media. Many were saddened by the poor result, realizing that the PISA results reflected the real and objective level of education quality. They started searching for ideas as to why Kyrgyzstan performed so poorly and discussing ways to improve the quality of education.

In 2009, CEATM conducted another PISA test in Kyrgyzstan, but results of this test were yet to be available at the time of writing this report.

The 2007 National Sample-Based Assessment

When the PISA results became public, there were people who were sceptical about the poor results. They were mostly older government and educational officials who had believed that the Soviet legacy of education in Kyrgyzstan still outperformed education in many other countries. They asked questions such as "We have an education system which we inherited from the Soviet period, so how can it be that bad?" Some also wondered "I cannot understand why Kyrgyzstan's students performed so poorly because our students are winning different international Olympiads in different subjects." There was distrust amongst certain layers of the population as to the validity of the PISA 2006 results as a true indicator of the school quality level in Kyrgyzstan.

In 2007, the National Sample-Based Assessment (NSBA) was carried out by CEATM in 2007, as part of the REP of World Bank, in accordance with national standards. A local consultant of REP of World Bank stated:

[63] The PISA 2006 assessment included 108 different questions at varying levels of difficulty. Usually several questions were posed about a single scientific problem described in a text or diagram. In many cases, students were required to construct a response in their own words to questions based on the text given. Sometimes they had to explain their results or to show their thought processes. Each student was awarded a score based on the difficulty of questions that he or she could reliably perform. Scores were reported for each of the three science competencies, and for overall performance in science. The science performance scales have been constructed so that the average student score in OECD countries is 500 points. In PISA 2006, about two-thirds of students scored between 400 and 600 points (i.e. a standard deviation equals 100 points). A score can be used to describe both the performance of a student and the difficulty of a question. Thus, for example, a student with a score of 650 can usually be expected to complete a question with a difficulty rating of 650, as well as questions with lower difficulty ratings.

> We knew that the PISA results would be viewed negatively by some people in Kyrgyzstan and anticipated that there would definitely be criticism that we want to "rank with Europe or other developed countries." We said, okay, let us then see the results according to our own standards, because we wanted to triangulate and validate the findings of PISA 2006. We conducted NSBA in 2007, and then we conducted a second NSBA in 2009. (Interview, April 3, 2010)

The NSBA was directly inspired and influenced by items in PISA 2006 and tested competences and skills such as the application of concepts in different contexts and logical reasoning. The 2007 NSBAs at grades 4 and 8 were based on Kyrgyzstan's Education Standards of 2005. In total, 6965 students of grades 4 and 8 from 202 schools across Kyrgyzstan were selected for this research using random sampling.

The results of NSBA 2007[64] confirmed the poor results of PISA 2006. As many as 64.4% of fourth grade students scored below basic level[65]in reading comprehension. In mathematics, no fourth graders scored at the highest level in math, while 62% scored below basic level, 28% at basic level, and only 8% -scored above basic level. The scores in science and reading comprehension were similarly low. Almost 65% of those tested scored at below basic level; 64,8% in science, 64,4% in reading comprehension. At the eighth grade level, the results were even worse: 84.3% scored below basic level in mathematics, and 73.5% scored below basic level in reading comprehension (CEATM, 2007)[66]. A World Bank REP specialist observed: "The results of the NSBA were nearly the same as those of PISA 2006. It means our students are not getting the quality of education according to even existing national education standards" (July, 28, 2009).

The results of PISA 2006 and NSBA 2007 increased awareness of the actual state of the education quality in Kyrgyzstan. They also became a springboard for advocacy efforts. Government and education authorities started using the test results as a reference point in forums and meetings. The poor results of Kyrgyzstan in PISA 2006 and NSBA 2007 were more than once used as a justification for the implementation of the reform by the government. As a result of both PISA and NSBA test, there have been efforts to improve education quality in Kyrgyzstan, but the efforts have been sporadic, fragmented and not very systematic.

All materials and information regarding tests conducted by CEATM are easily available on CEATM web page (www.testing.kg), in publications of reports, in information provided to MOES, international organizations, schools, students and general public via mass media. The staff of CEATM are also approachable and willingly share any information regarding the tests. All CEATM documents (regulations and other acts) are also publicly available. CEATM has a website which has many resources for teachers to guide them in their preparation of their students for NST and possibly assist them in teaching differently than in traditional ways. However, currently, only a small fraction of secondary school teachers, mostly from Bishkek and other urban centres, have access to internet.

Information regarding assessment results of NST, PISA and NSBA as aggregated data is available to public in forms of published reports, mass media publications and on-line documents at CEATM web page, however, individual scores of NST are not available to public because it is

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[64] In 2009, second National Sample-Based Assessment (NSBA) was also conducted. Its results showed that education quality in Kyrgyzstan remains poor.

[65] According to the definition given by the Centre for Education Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM), "below basic" means that *"students do not demonstrate sufficient knowledge and skills for successful further learning"*.

[66] NSBA results report, CEATM, 2007, http://www.testing.kg/files/NSBA07/NSBA_Report_2007.pdf

a high-stakes test, and only students themselves or their schools can have access to their results. Previously, CEATM got into trouble many times because the NST results were misused and many people suffered because of that. There is appeal procedure at NST, and individual students have the right for appellation and seeing their scripts and checking marking for possible errors.

NST data, especially test items were strictly confidential, because the CEATM staff were cautious that the test items would be misused by others and confidentially would be violated. As a result, those higher order thinking skills such as problem solving and critical thinking which are tested in NST are important competencies, but there was limited effort to connect them to teacher training institutions so that teachers could also learn to teach those competencies. Thus, other agencies in the system did not benefit much from potentially very useful area.

CEATM does not directly provide trainings on assessment for teachers, as they have no requests for that.

CEATM does not seem to have research and development unit, and they do not conduct what they call "secondary research" or research based on tests they conduct.

5. Financing

In addition to describing the amount of money budgeted for the NTC, the case studies should examine actual expenditures in terms of amount and category. The finance model of the NTC should be analyzed in terms of its contribution to, or negative impact on, realization of the objectives.

The establishment of CEATM and its NST project cost only one and half million USD (Todd Drummond, August 9, 2010), which is far less than many other educational projects are spending with limited impact. CEATM conducts educational tests and attempts to earn for its living. For example, money is obtained from different organizations, such as PISA and NSBA assessment were commissioned and financed Rural Education Project of World Bank. According to the representative of the REP of World Bank, it cost about half a million for PISA competition participation in 2006.

Following the principles of honesty and transparency, CEATM publishes its annual report on expenditure. Collected finance and used money are provided in the form of tables (See Appendix E). Hereby, I describe detailed information about finance matters of NST from the CEATM report from 2009. In 2009, CEATM won a tender announced by MOES to conduct NST. NST was conducted for money from registration fees, and partially funded by ACCELS (USAID). In total, 33 579 candidates took NST in 2009. 9 615 800 som were collected from registration fees. In addition, 12 611 772 som was provided by USAID and by selling of manuals / brochures of NST. As Todd Drummond stated, 85% of financing for NST normally comes from students' fees, and 15% from USAID.

From September 2008 to April 2009, test developers (university professors, school teachers) who were selected for developing test items, worked on development of test items, reviewing, editing, and translation of tests and so on. Salary of test developers, reviewers, CEATM administrators, and also for taxes and social funds payments, the money was used 2 545 221 som and 1 112 766 som. Translation into Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages cost 34 019 som. Before the final tests were ready, they were piloted and analyzed. Expenses for copies of test materials, test forms and piloting and analysis cost 98 263 som. For printing certificates, a color printer was purchased for 58 395 som.

To make convenient for candidates to save money and time for travelling, registration was conducted in each district of Kyrgyzstan. Test registration fee was 200 som for main test and 200 som for subject test in 2009. Registration for NST was done by district and town education offices and educational institutes. 64 people signed contract to work as registrars (responsible people) for 3 months. Their salary and money for tax reduction and social fund deduction cost 84 971 and 37 149 som respectively. Salary of staff of CEATM who provided consultation to registrars, tax and social fund cost 4 100 and 1 793 som respectively. Registrars were provided with materials necessary for their work (manual on registration, registration forms, talons of registration and ticket for NST, and so on). Materials for registration, information placates and materials for applicants were all printed and sent by post in required amounts to every registrar. Thus, post services cost 373 940 som. All working materials were provided in Kyrgyz and Russian. Expenses related to registration materials cost 119 358 som.

Every test-taker received free of charge copy of "Preparation for NST" brochure, not manual with the same name which is fee paying. In this brochure, applicants could get info about structure of test, rules of test and responsibilities of test-taker. Brochure was printed in Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek languages, and it cost 316 308 som.

To maintain secrecy, tests were printed in special typography (printing place). During test printing, guards responsible for confidentiality were on duty. Their work was also paid. For printing main and subject tests 805 507 som was spent. For preparing answer sheets were spent 58 978 som.

NST took place from 21 to 23 May and from 25 to 31 May, 2009. 88 test centers were established across Kyrgyzstan so that test-takers do not travel far to save money. NST was conducted by 348 administrators who underwent special training by CEATM staff. Test administrators were to strictly monitor the procedures of test, discipline and prescribed rules so that each candidate had equal opportunity. Training of test administrators cost 96 692 som. Each test administrator received all required materials for conducting test. All procedures of NST was documented in special protocols, and schemes of test-takers seating arrangements, were worked out, and printing of all these materials cost 18 950 som. Each team of administrators was provided with stationary (scotch, scissors, chart papers, pens, rulers and so on). Teams of test administrators traveled to 88 test centers established in each district of the country. Every team consisted of team leader and 10 administrators. Each team was provided with a minibus rented by CEATM for test administrators' travel and for transporting test materials. For conducting tests in the south of the country, round trip air-tickets were purchased for Bishkek-Osh-Bishkek, Bishkek-Batken-Bishkek, Bishkek-Jalalabad-Bishkek races for 627 540 som. Test administrators were paid per diem, cost of which and tax and social fund was 2 335 850 and 1021229 som respectively.

Certificates with NST scores of candidates were printed in special papers protected from false copies. To maintain confidentiality and objectivity of test results, printing of certificates is done at CEATM office with color printer. Expenses related to preparation and printing of certificates cost 179 695 som. Every candidate received certificate with their NST scores, and certificates were handed during farewell party at schools.

CEATM does massive information campaign as follows

- "hot line" (telephone service) organized at CEATM office
- information tables on NST and its registration organized in each school
- Information on NST registration published in central and regional newspapers in Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek.

- Advertisement about registration and rules of NST shown on Kyrgyz national TV channel KTR showed in Kyrgyz and Russian.
- Information on NST registration presented in National Radio Channel and channel Evropa +
- Web page of CEATM (www.testing.kg) containing all required information about test and registration
- Information in newspapers (e.g., "Kupi – prodai" (buy and sell), teachers' newspaper Kutbilim and others)

For publication of test materials in Kyrgyz and Russian in Kutbilim newspaper, and in TV channel KTR, in radio channel Kyrgyzstan *Obondoru*, Evropa +, it was spent 127 644 som.

Thus, all these financial matters are openly described in annual reports and on webpage of CEATM.

6. Lessons learnt

There is a shortage of solid and systematic research of the aptitude tests and their implications for equity and quality issues in a society such as Kyrgyzstan which is experiencing dramatic changes and issues of equity and worsening quality of education are top priority. The test results need to be systematically analyzed and used to strengthen the education system. The test results could be used more effectively in addressing this disparity as well as improving quality of education. As the competencies tested in NST, PISA and NSBA are considered very important, it is imperative that proactive attempts are made to promote the same competencies in all schools, and especially in village and mountain schools. It is necessary to proactive improve teaching and learning in those schools as well as correct imbalances in resources in education, particularly in rural and mountain area schools.

Regarding National Scholarship Test, it is necessary to achieve that talented youth from rural schools are well represented in the most prestigious universities. Grants are distributed proportionally to quota categories, however, majority of grant winners from rural and mountain schools get enrolled in universities in regions rather that in Bishkek. They usually enter lower prestige universities and faculties because their scores are low and they cannot compete with the top scores of Bishkek. It is imperative to mandate the faculties that they enrol students according to quota categories. To correct imbalances in how grants are assigned, it is necessary to introduce quota category for departments but not for universities. I am mindful that some top universities will resent this because they fear that students' coming with lower NST due to quota categories may lower their standards and perhaps ultimately undermine the quality of high quality institutions. However, these universities should be made aware that the scores of the applicants from rural and especially mountain schools far lower than those of urban (Bishkek) schools' students not because they are less able, but primarily due to poorer quality of schooling they had been exposed. Universities thus can work proactively to help these applicants by offering additional training.

As a rule, high quality universities are located in Bishkek. Currently, many village students apply to regional universities instead of coming to Bishkek, because living in Bishkek is expensive. It is necessary to take proactive measures to help rural students attend urban universities otherwise the gap and stratification will further increase, only small fraction of students in big cities' students keep getting quality education. If a quota system helps students from rural areas come into the best universities in Bishkek, it is necessary to ensure they will succeed and maintain that institutions' standards. Universities themselves need to offer additional courses, but the scholarship from the state should include not only tuition fees, but

also accommodation expenses too. Many applicants often choose to enter smaller and less prestigious universities in provincial centres or small towns precisely because living in Bishkek is very costly.

Eventually, perhaps it is necessary to eliminate the budget places at universities in Kyrgyzstan. There are many cases when parents who can afford to pay contract fees, still want their children to study in budget places. The budget system could be replaced by university-based discounts in fee payments to students based on their performance, while the government could then allocate funds for needs-based scholarship only. This needs-based scholarship could include not only university fees, but also accommodation, books and other expenses which allow promising applicants from around the country to apply and study at any university irrespective where they are from.

As stated above, one of the unintentional negative consequences of the introduction of NST has been the rise of private tutoring which specifically prepared the students to take NST thus resulting in continued inequity within the education system (Silova, 2009). If any individual is being deprived of the equal opportunities to compete for state scholarships due to their financial constraints, then definitely the government officials should work on it. The education officials in Kyrgyzstan need to do systematic analysis and develop necessary safety nets in place so that there will be no anticipated or unanticipated fall-outs based on testing.

Most of the issues raised by the creation, implementation and direct and indirect outcomes of the NTS are related to broader educational issues in Kyrgyzstan. There is a need for more consolidated collaboration and joint work among stakeholders who work on education standards, curriculum development, textbook publication, teacher training and re-training, assessment and evaluation. International organizations involved on education reforms in Kyrgyzstan, under able monitoring and coordination of the Ministry of Education, should work collaboratively. They will have very limited success because their activities are not well coordinated. Projects are duplicated and nearly most of them were not institutionalized, resulting in a lack of sustainability.[67] International organizations are involved in small projects for long-term periods with separate reform initiatives, and therefore, fail to implement systemic change.[68] Systemic chance in the education is possible when all stakeholders and international organizations coordinate their activities with each other.

To conclude, Kyrgyzstan achieved a lot of progress with its initiatives of establishing independent testing organization. It took strong will and commitment from MOES to initiative this reform, but full support from government and president of the country was necessary to pursue this initiative and sustain it. Finally, would other countries in Central Asia want to learn from the successful experience of Kyrgyzstan in the field of testing is another matter, because of the latest tragic events in the country, because of the poor socio-economic conditions in the country, many neighbours would rather want to learn from US, or even Russia, but not from Kyrgyzstan.

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[67] Gita Steiner-Khamsi, Sina Mossayeb, and Natasha Ridge, "*Curriculum and Student Assessment, Pre-Service Teacher Training – An assessment in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan*," (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, February 2007), pp. 57-58

[68] Amaliya Benliyan, "*Grajdanka Gita,"* Newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek, Friday, 28 July, 2008, page 27

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Appendix A

Утверждено
постановлением Правительства
Кыргызской Республики
от 2 июня 2006 года N 404

ПОЛОЖЕНИЕ
об общереспубликанском тестировании абитуриентов,
претендующих на государственные образовательные гранты

(В редакции постановления Правительства КР от
27 августа 2007 года N 377)

I. Общие положения
II. Независимая тестовая служба
III. Функции министерства в подготовке и проведении тестирования
IV. Тесты
V. Процедура регистрации
VI. Процедура тестирования
VII. Документ о результатах тестирования и порядок его выдачи
VIII. Заключительные положения

I. Общие положения

1. Настоящее Положение разработано в соответствии с Законом Кыргызской Республики "Об образовании" и устанавливает порядок проведения общереспубликанского тестирования абитуриентов (далее - тестирование).

2. Тестирование проводится с целью выявления наиболее способных и подготовленных абитуриентов к обучению в вузах и предоставления им государственных образовательных грантов на обучение в государственных высших учебных заведениях (далее - вуз).

3. В тестировании могут участвовать граждане Кыргызской Республики, имеющие среднее общее или среднее профессиональное образование. К тестированию не допускаются граждане, имеющие высшее образование или обучающиеся в вузах на момент регистрации для тестирования. Иностранные граждане могут участвовать в тестировании и претендовать на государственный образовательный грант, если имеются соответствующие международные договоры между Кыргызской Республикой и соответствующим государством.

4. Процедура тестирования абитуриентов проводится гласно, с освещением в средствах массовой информации.

II. Независимая тестовая служба

5. Независимая тестовая служба (далее - НТС) - негосударственная организация, специализирующаяся на независимой оценке в области образования с использованием методов о тестировании.

6. НТС ежегодно определяется Министерством образования и науки Кыргызской Республики (далее - министерство). Между министерством и НТС заключается контракт о проведении тестирования текущего года.

(В редакции постановления Правительства КР от 27 августа 2007 года N 377)

См.:
приказ Минобразнауки КР от 22 февраля 2008 года N 86/1 "О Независимой тестовой службе"

7. НТС, ответственная за тестирование, обеспечивает:
- разработку тестовых заданий, основанных на программе общеобразовательной школы;
- строгую секретность тестовых заданий;
- информационную поддержку подготовки процедуры регистрации и тестирования;
- проведение региональных информационных семинаров, тренингов по подготовке персонала, ответственного за регистрацию и тестирование;
- материально-техническое и методическое обеспечение регистрации и тестирования;
- объективное и гласное проведение тестирования;
- конфиденциальность и достоверность обработки результатов тестирования в сроки, определяемые министерством.

8. После окончания тестирования НТС представляет министерству отчет о результатах тестирования.

9. НТС и работники министерства не имеют права разглашать или передавать третьим лицам

информацию о количестве набранных абитуриентом баллов, без его согласия. Информация о количестве набранных баллов передается только по запросу грантовой комиссии вуза, в который абитуриент прошел по конкурсу.

10. НТС создает архив документации, относящейся к завершившемуся тестированию абитуриентов и зачислению в вузы, передает копии документов зачисленных абитуриентов в соответствующие вузы, хранит листы ответов и регистрационные формы абитуриентов.

11. НТС проводит мониторинг успеваемости грантообладателей в целях выявления качества тестирования и принятия мер по его улучшению. В связи с этим НТС вправе запрашивать, а вузы должны предоставлять информацию об успеваемости грантообладателей, а также информацию об успеваемости студентов, не являющихся грантообладателями, - для проведения сравнительного анализа.

12. НТС имеет право аннулировать результаты тестирования в случаях нарушения секретности, пропажи, а также в случаях нарушения абитуриентами правил тестирования или представления ими поддельных документов и ложных сведений.

III. Функции министерства в подготовке и проведении тестирования

13. Функциями министерства в ходе подготовки и проведения тестирования абитуриентов являются:

- обеспечение НТС необходимыми нормативными документами;
- информационное обеспечение населения республики через средства массовой информации и органы управления образованием на местах о тестировании; направлениях, специальностях и распределении количества грантов по вузам; о категориях абитуриентов; адресах регистрационных пунктов; сроках, местах и времени проведения тестирования; порядке и правилах процедуры тестирования и иной информацией, обеспечивающей открытость и гласность проводимой кампании;
- общий мониторинг процесса подготовки, организации и проведения тестирования абитуриентов;
- установление сроков регистрации абитуриентов;
- формирование и утверждение перечня направлений и специальностей, требующих дополнительного тестирования, и утверждение соответствующего перечня дополнительных предметных тестов;
- утверждение перечня специальностей, требующих дополнительных испытаний (искусство, физическая культура, военное дело и т.п.);
- содействие НТС в осуществлении регистрации и тестирования абитуриентов (согласно контракту между министерством и НТС);
- формирование и утверждение списка наблюдателей от международных и неправительственных организаций, средств массовой информации за процедурами тестирования и зачисления абитуриентов в вузы (согласно контракту между министерством и НТС);
- установление порогового балла для зачисления в вузы (пороговый балл - минимальное количество баллов, необходимых для участия в конкурсе на зачисление в вузы).

IV. Тесты

14. Для тестирования абитуриентов используются тесты двух видов: основной тест и предметные тесты, которые составляются на кыргызском, русском или любом другом языке. Результаты тестирования по видам тестов оцениваются отдельно.

15. Основной тест содержит задания для оценки общих математических знаний, словесно-логических способностей и грамматических навыков абитуриента. Тестирование по этому виду теста обязательно для всех абитуриентов, участвующих в тестировании.

16. Предметные тесты содержат задания для выявления уровня знаний абитуриентов по конкретному предмету. Тестирование по этому виду тестов проводится только для тех абитуриентов, которые поступают на направления и специальности, включенные в перечень направлений и специальностей, требующих дополнительного тестирования.

V. Процедура регистрации

17. Процедура регистрации определяется НТС и доводится до сведения учащихся через средства массовой информации, региональные отделы образования и администрации средних школ.

18. Лица, не прошедшие регистрацию в установленный срок, могут зарегистрироваться не позднее, чем за одну неделю до начала тестирования за отдельную плату, с дальнейшим прохождением тестирования в городе Бишкек в срок, определенный НТС совместно с министерством.

19. Предоставление абитуриентами ложной информации в ходе регистрации влечет за собой невозможность прохождения ими тестирования.

20. Величина регистрационного взноса устанавливается НТС по согласованию с соответствующим государственным органом, отвечающим за государственное регулирование ценообразования, исходя из фактических расходов НТС на проведение тестирования.

Регистрационные взносы не возвращаются абитуриентам в случае нарушения ими правил регистрации, их неучастия в тестировании или удаления с тестирования за несоблюдение правил тестирования.

VI. Процедура тестирования

21. Тестирование и место его проведения определяются НТС.

22. Тестирование проводится по правилам, устанавливаемым НТС, с которыми абитуриенты могут ознакомиться в брошюре, выданной во время или после регистрации.

23. Перед тестированием представители НТС проводят устный инструктаж абитуриентов о порядке тестирования и правилах поведения абитуриентов в ходе тестирования.

24. При нарушении абитуриентом правил тестирования ему делается замечание, а при повторном нарушении он может быть удален с тестирования с составлением протокола об удалении, подписываемого всеми членами административной группы, проводящими данное тестирование.

25. Опоздавшие на тестирование абитуриенты могут быть допущены к выполнению тестовых заданий по окончании устного инструктажа и до начала тестирования без продления времени тестирования.

26. Абитуриенты, не принявшие участие в тестировании по уважительным причинам, таким как:

- пребывание за пределами республики в связи с международными обучающими программами;
- участие в спортивных соревнованиях международного и республиканского уровней - по предоставлении официальных документов;
- состояние здоровья, подтвержденное соответствующими документами согласно утвержденному перечню;
- имеют право пройти тестирование в сроки, определенные НТС совместно с министерством.

VII. Документ о результатах тестирования и порядок его выдачи

27. Официальным документом о результатах тестирования, выдаваемым абитуриенту, является сертификат (далее - сертификат), в котором содержится информация о количестве баллов, набранных абитуриентом при тестировании. Сертификат выдается абитуриенту НТС. Сертификат имеет защиту от подделок.

28. Сертификат выдается абитуриенту или его доверенному лицу в местах, определенных НТС и объявленных через средства массовой информации, либо по месту регистрации при предъявлении необходимых документов на выдачу сертификата.

29. При утере сертификата НТС выдает абитуриенту подтверждение о количестве набранных на тестировании баллов по его заявлению и при оплате стоимости подтверждения. Не допускается выдача подтверждения без предварительного объявления абитуриентом в средствах массовой информации о недействительности ранее выданного сертификата.

VIII. Заключительные положения

30. В случае нарушения администраторами порядка и условий тестирования абитуриент имеет право подать заявление в НТС о замеченных нарушениях в течение 3-х дней со дня проведения тестирования. Если нарушения имели место, НТС обеспечивает условия для проведения повторного объективного тестирования в недельный срок с момента получения заявления. При проведении повторного тестирования вправе присутствовать наблюдатели от министерства.

31. Абитуриент, не получивший свой сертификат по неопределенной причине, вправе обратиться за разъяснениями в НТС.

32. НТС имеет право подвергнуть абитуриента повторному тестированию, если у НТС есть на это обоснованные причины.

Appendix B

Утверждено постановлением Правительства Кыргызской Республики от 2 июня 2006 года N 404.

ПОЛОЖЕНИЕ о государственных образовательных грантах для обучения студентов в государственных высших учебных заведениях Кыргызской Республики (В редакции постановлений Правительства КР от 27 августа 2007 года N 377, 3 июня 2009 года N 336)

I. Государственный образовательный грант
II. Грантовые комиссии
III. Порядок отбора и зачисления абитуриентов в вузы
IV. Наблюдатели
V. Права и обязанности грантообладателя
VI. Права и обязанности вуза в отношении грантообладателя

Настоящее Положение разработано в соответствии с Законом Кыргызской Республики "Об образовании" и устанавливает механизм выполнения государственного заказа в области подготовки специалистов по приоритетным для республики направлениям и специальностям, а также порядок конкурсного отбора и зачисления в государственные высшие учебные заведения (далее - вузы) республики по результатам общереспубликанского тестирования абитуриентов и присуждения им государственных образовательных грантов.

I. Государственный образовательный грант

1. Государственный образовательный грант (далее - грант) – безвозмездные финансовые средства, выделяемые государством конкретному лицу (далее - грантообладатель) на обучение в государственном вузе по направлению или специальности, включенной в государственный заказ на подготовку специалистов по приоритетным для республики направлениям и специальностям.

2. Размер и число грантов в разрезе министерств, учебных заведений, специальностей определяются Правительством Кыргызской Республики по предложению Министерства образования и науки Кыргызской Республики (далее - министерство). (В редакции постановления Правительства КР от 27 августа 2007 года N 377)

3. Гранты (кроме грантов, выделенных на специальностях сферы культуры, искусства, физической культуры и спорта) предоставляются на конкурсной основе гражданам Кыргызской Республики, имеющим среднее общее или среднее профессиональное образование, по результатам общереспубликанского тестирования (далее - тестирование) абитуриентов, проводимого независимой службой тестирования (далее - НТС), а также иностранным гражданам, если имеются соответствующие международные договоры между Кыргызской Республикой и соответствующим государством.

4. Грант используется вузом на расходы, связанные с учебным процессом, организационными и воспитательными мероприятиями, а также на выплату стипендии грантообладателю в зависимости от его успеваемости. Средства не используемых и освободившихся грантов направляются министерством на развитие учебно-материальной базы государственных вузов.

5. Министерство может формировать резервный фонд грантов, составляющий не более 100 грантов. Гранты из резервного фонда выделяются на основании личных заявлений граждан или заявок вузов для следующих категорий абитуриентов: из малообеспеченных семей, сиротам, полусиротам, социальным сиротам, из многодетных семей, из отдаленных высокогорных районов республики при условии предоставления подтверждающих документов. Решения о выделении грантов из резервного фонда принимаются Государственной грантовой комиссией при министерстве, при условии подтверждения со стороны НТС баллов по тестированию.

В состав комиссии входят 5 человек:
- министр образования и науки Кыргызской Республики;
- представитель международной образовательной организации;
- представитель отдела образования, культуры и спорта Аппарата Правительства Кыргызской Республики;
- представитель правозащитной организации;
- представитель Министерства финансов Кыргызской Республики.

Организация и координация работы комиссии осуществляется министром образования и науки Кыргызской Республики. Решения комиссии принимаются простым большинством голосов присутствующих членов комиссии. (В редакции постановления Правительства КР от 27 августа 2007 года N 377)

II. Грантовые комиссии
6. В целях обеспечения объективного и прозрачного конкурсного отбора и зачисления прошедших тестирование абитуриентов в вузы республики в вузах создаются независимые грантовые комиссии (далее - комиссии) в составе: - ректора вуза (председатель комиссии); - представителя центрального или регионального органа управления образованием;
- по одному представителю руководства каждого факультета вуза, на направления и специальности которого проводится конкурсное зачисление по результатам тестирования.

7. Администрация вуза обеспечивает комиссию помещением, опечатываемыми ящиками (урнами) для сбора отрывных талонов сертификатов, отдельно по каждому факультету, и стендами для размещения информации о ходе конкурса и зачисления абитуриентов в вуз, а также предоставляет другие организационные услуги для успешного выполнения комиссией своих обязанностей.
8. В обязанности комиссии входит:
- опечатывание и установка ящиков (урн) для сбора отрывных талонов сертификатов в присутствии всех членов комиссии, а также непосредственное наблюдение самого процесса сброса отрывных талонов сертификатов абитуриентами в течение установленного времени;
- вскрытие ящиков (урн) и подсчет отдельно по каждому ящику (урне) количества отрывных талонов сертификатов в присутствии всех членов комиссии;
- составление протоколов о количестве отрывных талонов сертификатов отдельно по каждому ящику (урне), подписываемых всеми членами комиссии;
- составление рейтинговых списков абитуриентов, участвующих в конкурсе, которые подписываются всеми членами комиссии;
- составление списков абитуриентов, рекомендуемых к зачислению в вуз по каждой категории абитуриентов;
- передача списков абитуриентов, подтвердивших желание быть зачисленными в вуз и рекомендуемых к зачислению в вуз, в НТС для подтверждения результатов тестирования по установленной форме;

- ежедневное и оперативное обновление информации на стенде о ходе конкурса и его результатах.

9. Комиссия выполняет свои обязанности гласно и открыто. На заседаниях комиссии вправе присутствовать наблюдатели от международных и неправительственных организаций и средств массовой информации.

III. Порядок отбора и зачисления абитуриентов в вузы

10. Конкурсное распределение грантов осуществляется на основании результатов тестирования текущего года (кроме грантов, выделенных на специальности культуры и искусства, физической культуры и спорта).
11. Вне конкурса зачисляются:
- абитуриенты, набравшие в текущем году наиболее высокие баллы по результатам общереспубликанского тестирования, в выбранные вузы и на выбранные специальности из утвержденного Перечня направлений и специальностей в рамках государственного заказа. Количество грантов для зачисления данной категории абитуриентов не должно превышать 50;
- абитуриенты, занявшие в текущем году 1 место в республиканской олимпиаде школьников или являющиеся призерами международных олимпиад, на специальности и направления естественнонаучного, гуманитарного и социально-экономического, медицинского, сельскохозяйственного и технического профилей, с которыми совпадает предмет олимпиады, по выбору абитуриентов, при условии их участия в общереспубликанском тестировании;
- абитуриенты, занявшие в текущем году 2 место в республиканской олимпиаде школьников, на специальности и направления, по которым предмет олимпиады является профилирующим, при условии их участия в общереспубликанском тестировании;
- абитуриенты, занявшие в текущем году 3 место в республиканской олимпиаде школьников, на педагогические специальности, по которым предмет олимпиады является профилирующим, при условии их участия в общереспубликанском тестировании.
(В редакции постановления Правительства КР от 3 июня 2009 года N 336)
12. Конкурсное распределение грантов и зачисление абитуриентов в вузы по результатам тестирования может осуществляться раздельно, в рамках отдельных категорий абитуриентов, устанавливаемых министерством. Министерство разрабатывает и утверждает инструкцию о категориях абитуриентов и порядке распределения грантов по ним. Дети_____-сироты, инвалиды 1 и 2 групп, военнослужащие, уволенные в запас, отнесенные к категории льготников по признакам, установленным Правительством Кыргызской Республики, зачисляются в вузы на основе конкурса в рамках этой категории. Инструкцией могут регламентироваться также другие условия, касающиеся порядка конкурсного отбора и зачисления абитуриентов в вузы по результатам тестирования.
13. К конкурсному зачислению на направления и специальности, требующие дополнительных испытаний, перечень которых утверждается министерством, допускаются те абитуриенты, которые успешно прошли эти испытания.
14. Конкурсное распределение грантов и зачисление абитуриентов на специальности культуры и искусства, физической культуры и спорта осуществляется на основе специальных испытаний, проводимых вузами. Перечень вузов и специальностей, при зачислении на которые результаты тестирования не обязательны, ежегодно определяется министерством.
См.: приказ Минобразнауки КР от 3 мая 2007 года N 231/1 "Об утверждении перечней специальностей"; приказ Минобразнауки КР от 14 апреля 2009 года N 257/1 "Об утверждении перечней специальностей"

15. Сведения о необходимости прохождения дополнительных испытаний для участия в конкурсе на получение гранта и выполнения связанных с ними каких-либо дополнительных условий доводятся до абитуриента и его родителей до начала общереспубликанского тестирования.
16. Процедура конкурсного распределения грантов и отбора абитуриентов в вузы по результатам тестирования проводится комиссиями в два тура. При наличии невостребованных грантов после проведения второго тура допускается проведение третьего тура отбора по запросу вуза и с разрешения министерства. Правила и процедуры конкурсного отбора и зачисления во всех трех турах идентичны.
17. Сроки, порядок проведения туров отбора и зачисления абитуриентов по итогам общереспубликанского тестирования устанавливаются отдельным положением, утверждаемым министерством.
18. Вузы представляют в министерство отчеты о количестве зачисленных абитуриентов, а также информацию об использовании грантов из резервного фонда, в течение 3 дней после окончания процедуры конкурсного зачисления абитуриентов.
19. Абитуриенты, не прошедшие конкурс на обучение по грантам, имеют право участвовать в конкурсах и быть зачисленными на контрактные отделения вузов или средних профессиональных учебных заведений на основании результатов тестирования, а также результатов дополнительных испытаний.
20. При нарушении процедуры зачисления абитуриент или наблюдатели вправе в течение 3 дней апеллировать в министерство.
IV. Наблюдатели
21. В целях обеспечения гласного, открытого и объективного отбора и зачисления абитуриентов в вузы на конкурсной основе по результатам тестирования министерство формирует и утверждает список наблюдателей за проведением отбора абитуриентов в вузы из представителей международных и неправительственных организаций и средств массовой информации, Администрации Президента Кыргызской Республики и Аппарата Премьер-министра Кыргызской Республики. Количество наблюдателей в каждом вузе не должно превышать 10 человек.
22. Наблюдателям предоставляется свободный доступ в помещения, где установлены ящики (урны) для сбора отрывных талонов сертификатов, на заседания комиссии и право наблюдения за всеми процедурами, начиная от сбора отрывных талонов сертификатов до составления списков абитуриентов, рекомендуемых к зачислению в вуз.
23. Наблюдатели не вправе принимать непосредственное участие в работе комиссии, совершать действия, препятствующие деятельности комиссии, участвовать или вмешиваться в процесс принятия решений комиссией.
V. Права и обязанности грантообладателя
24. Грантообладатель имеет все права и обязанности в соответствии с законодательством Кыргызской Республики и уставами вузов.
25. Грантообладатель, прекративший обучение по уважительной причине (состояние здоровья, семейные обстоятельства, временное выбытие за пределы республики и т.п.), сохраняет право на грант при восстановлении на обучение в данном вузе.
26. Грантообладатель обязан овладеть теоретическими знаниями, профессиональными умениями и навыками на уровне требований государственных образовательных стандартов, выполнять в установленные сроки все виды заданий, предусмотренных учебным планом и программами обучения, соблюдать устав учебного заведения и правила внутреннего распорядка.
27. Перевод грантообладателей из одного вуза в другой или внутри одного вуза на неродственную специальность не допускается. Перевод грантообладателя с грантом из вуза в вуз на ту же или родственную специальность в исключительных случаях допускается вузом только по уважительной причине (по состоянию здоровья, смена места жительства и т.п.) и при наличии подтверждающих документов.

VI. Права и обязанности вуза в отношении грантообладателя

28. Вуз обязан создать равные условия обучения грантообладателям и студентам, обучающимся на контрактной основе.

29. Вуз имеет право отчислить грантообладателя из числа студентов в случаях:

- неосвоения теоретического материала, профессиональных умений и навыков на уровне требований государственных образовательных стандартов;
- невыполнения всех видов учебных заданий в сроки, предусмотренные учебным планом и программой обучения;
- несоблюдения устава и правил внутреннего распорядка вуза.

30. В случае отчисления грантообладателя вуз обязан официально сообщить об этом в министерство.

31. Вуз обязан ежеквартально представлять сведения о численности грантообладателей и сдавать финансовые отчеты по ним.

Appendix C

г.Бишкек от 22 февраля 2008 года N 86/1

ПРИКАЗ МИНИСТЕРСТВА ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ И НАУКИ
КЫРГЫЗСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ

О Независимой тестовой службе

В соответствии со статьей 40 Закона Кыргызской Республики "Об образовании", в целях реализации пункта 6 Положения об общереспубликанском тестировании абитуриентов, претендующих на государственные образовательные гранты, утвержденного постановлением Правительства Кыргызской Республики от 2 июня 2006 года N 404, с целью эффективного и своевременного проведения общереспубликанского тестирования абитуриентов 2008 года приказываю:

1. Определить в качестве Независимой тестовой службы на 2008 год "Центр оценки в образовании и методов обучения".
2. Управлению дошкольного, школьного и внешкольного образования (Усеналиев М.Ж.) и Управлению профессионального образования (Садыков К.Ж.) подготовить к подписанию соответствующий контракт между Министерством образования и науки Кыргызской Республики и "Центром оценки в образовании и методов обучения".
3. Управлению дошкольного, школьного и внешкольного образования (Усеналиев М.) совместно с НТС решить организационные вопросы по подготовке и проведению общереспубликанского тестирования абитуриентов, включая:
- определение совместно с НТС сроков проведения регистрации и общереспубликанского тестирования выпускников школ;
- уточнение совместно с Управлением ПО кодификатора школ и средних профессиональных учебных заведений;
- утверждение списка лиц, ответственных за регистрацию и дальнейшее курирование абитуриентов в территориальных отделах образования;
- утверждение списка центров тестирования и их оснащение необходимым оборудованием.
4. Управлению профессионального образования (Садыков К.Ж.) утвердить перечень вузов и специальностей, требующих дополнительных предметных тестов и дополнительных испытаний;
5. Контроль за исполнением данного приказа оставляю за собой.

Министр образования и науки
Кыргызской Республики И.Болджурова

Appendix D

Project of Open Kyrgyzstan, of Soros Foundation, Kyrgyzstan. TV discussion National Scholarship Testing or Unified State Examination: What is the difference? April 16, 2009

MOES is not ready to refuse NST of CEATM, because there is no alternative at the moment.
Abdylda Musaev officially stated: due to various reasons, currently Kyrgyzstan cannot change from NST and we cannot experiment with the lives of thousands of students. But in the coming years, we will have wide discussions on more effective forms of assessment of students' knowledge". The things are not clear and yet to be decided. http://www.open.kg/ru/theme/?theme_id=97

Nina Dolzhenko
Director of gymnasium in Kant
I was with NST from the very beginning. First, I was an administrator, now I am a leader. I should say that today it is the only which worked well, correct, transparent. My students look forward to participate in it to test their knowledge and to get NST scores and enter universities. This is excellent. I want to reassure university representatives that students enter university with high marks of NST will prove their good knowledge at universities too. You will not reproach that they did not cope with the school programme.

Sergei Makarov
Golden certificate winner of 2004
I consider NST as absolutely transparent. The arguments of opponents are trivial. When we were taking national testing, all manuals were ready and with people, and we already had ready – ticked answers, and these manuals were in front of us, and they were out of school. Anyone could take a break, go out and look at the answers and note them. From my experience, I can tell about the success of NST, there was a young man from Batken in our group. He entered Slavonic university, department of international relations on NST scores. The whole Batken was sending him to Bishkek. Those students who entered KRSU via Russia's budget on internal exam of the university, they eventually got sifted and their results were poorer than those who entered via NST.

Isa Omurkulov
Member of Parliament
We should not confuse quality of education with conditions of university admissions. I consider NST as the most transparent and open condition for university entrance of our applicants. School programme is the same everywhere. If MoES considers NST not effective, then as in 2003, it is possible to introduce new / subject tests into NST. All legislations in the system of education are approved at parliament, so we will support all initiatives for the improvement, as amendments, or additions to rules. Test development goes the following process. First, tests go through several reviews and even the test developers do not know if their test items are in NST for that year or not. If anything can be added to the NST, I suggest that maybe to include physics test for those who want to enter technical universities. We can improve these. But NST should stay. To improve quality of education in rural and urban areas, we need to work on teacher supply. There is shortage of textbooks and other materials. I would suggest the new minister to work on these, and also to raise teachers' salary, then quality will improve.

Inna Valkova
Director of CEATM

There is only one goal of NST that is to provide equal access to higher education. that is necessary to select those who are capable and deserving to study in grant / budget places irrespective of their social background, whether they can attend schools or not.

There is a competition of quota categories, i.e. Bishkek students have their own competition and do not compete against rural students.

Zeinep Jamakeeva
Director of National testing center of Ministry of education and science

NST is testing only preparedness of an applicant to study at university, but it is not testing knowledge. Research of management of higher education shows that 36% of new entrants on NST scores cannot complete university. NST cannot be accused directly if lowering the quality of education, but it plays some role. For example, we conduct test at our National Testing Center, and before around 60-70% of students wanted to take test, let us say in physics, but this number is decreasing year by year. Now, only 14-15% of students want to take test in physics. It is the same with chemistry, geography and other subjects. But most children want to take tests in mathematics and languages, because parents of these students know that their children will get better chances in the future to succeed in NST.

UST should become a sold examination of school graduation as well as university entrance. Thus, student getting certificate of this type can enter university, not only budget but also contract basis.

Kanat Sadykov, deputy MoES
NST's task is to select those who will study at university. But MoES wants to do more and to check students' knowledge against the school programme. Because we note that international competitions show that our students' knowledge is getting worse, though the school leaving certificates show that the situation is the same, and in some case the result is even better. That is why in addition to NST, we need independent measurement of students' knowledge, and also to raise interest of schools and students in objective marking. USE will examine quality of master of school programme. It is also called unified, because it should cover all graduates, every year around 80 thousand finish schools. Less than half of the graduates participate in NST.
Thus, USE will attempt to motivate students to study. Currently, even the winners of Olympiads, or let us say the ones who got second position, cannot enter budget place if their NST result is not good. We learned from experiences of Russia, Kazakhstan and Armenia, and we will introduce USE step by step. First, piloting will be done in some districts, and we will see the results.

Gaisha Ibragimova
Founder of Ilim (educational Foundation)
It is known that education standards of post-soviet countries nowadays are directed at acquiring knowledge. That is a certain volume of information which students should be able to reproduce. It is a narrow and not related to real life knowledge. But in current globalization conditions and rapid information growth, people should not only know, but more importantly to be able to use that knowledge and skills and be able to solve real-life problems. They are called competencies, life skills, and life long learning.

Thus, NST was the first in post-Soviet context an assessment tool which assessed thinking, and skills of using knowledge in real life situations. That is why; the tasks of NST are entirely different.

For the last several years since the NST operated in Kyrgyzstan, the country has got a large number of competent specialists in the field of assessment. They are test developers, consultants, instructors who work on organizing testing, analytics who do research on assessment and testing, and specialists of education politics. But today, we should not drop everything due to some suspicious political interests.

Today, even Russia with its great potential, experience, and achievements in the field of education cannot build a perfect testing system because there are so many political and politicized actors with different interests and intentions.

USE in Russia, as it is widely acknowledged at the highest levels, in addition to large wastages of money, was not able to solve its goals. It did not become a powerful weapon to combat corruption. Neither it become an instrument to shape and form state policy on education.

Discussions about USE have emerged recently because Russia is giving WB 30 million dollars for executing READ project to support the poorest countries. This programme is meant to develop independent assessment system. In addition to Ethiopia, Mozambique and Zambia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are also included. Isn't it paradox that our country which introduced a test on cognitive, creative thinking skills is also in this list?

During last five years new rectors came, and previous rectors with whom we spent much time explaining about NST are no longer at rectors. Thus, new people do not know the insights. Moreover, recently, MoES did not hide their negative attitudes towards NST. Thus, now regress. If in 2004 the results of NST were considered for contract basis students, but now it is not

Appendix E

Поступления от регистрационных взносов составили	**9 615 800 сомов**
Всего расходов на проведение тестирования (в том числе на средства гранта USAID и на средства от продажи пособий)	**12 611 772 сомов**

Отчет о расходовании средств, поступивших от регистрационных взносов абитуриентов за период с 1 сентября 2008 г. по 1 сентября 2009 г.

1. Административные расходы и разработка тестов

№	Статьи расходов	Итого сом
1	Заработная плата разработчиков тестов,переводчиков (3 языка), рецензентов и лидеров групп и адм. персонала 107 чел.	2 545 221
2	Отчисления в Соц.Фонд и подоходный налог	1 112 766
3	Расходы на перевод	34 019
4	Аренда офиса	427 989
5	Услуги банка	41 580
6	Услуги связи (телефон)	99440
7	Транспортные услуги	40155
8	Прочие административные расходы	23 271
9	Расходы на обслуживание ОС	12 308
10	Проведение апробации тестовых заданий	98 263
11	Расходы по оплате услуг	13 131
12	Расходы на охрану	127 726
13	Расходы на канцелярские товары	10 405
14	Расходы на приобретение принтера	58 395
15	Амортизация ОС	50 005
16	**Итого административные расходы**	**4 694 674**

2. Регистрация на тест

№	Статьи расходов	Итого, сом
1	Руководство по регистрации для ответственных лиц, Кодификатор, Регистрационные формы, талоны и приложения	119 358
2	Брошюра "Готовимся к Общереспубликанскому тесту"	316 308
3	Почтовые услуги	373 940
4	Зар.плата регистраторов (ответ.лиц- райОО,горОО)	84 971
5	Отчисления в Соц.Фонд и подоходный налог	37 149
6	Канц.товары:скоросшиватели,файлы,резинки, конверты	42 014
7	Зар.плата деж.консультантов	4 100
8	Отчисления в Соц.Фонд и подоходный налог	1 793
9	**Итого**	**979 632**

3. Расходы по производству тетрадей тестов

№	Статьи расходов	Итого, сом
1	Тетради по основному и предметным тестам	805 507
2	Листы ответов	58 978
3	Обеспечение охраны в типографии-зар.плата охранников	56 000
4	Отчисления в Соц.Фонд и подоходный налог	24 483
5	**ВСЕГО**	**944 968**

4. Проведение тестирования

№	Статьи расходов	Всего, сом
1	Транспортные расходы (авиабилеты)	627 540
2	Транспортные расходы (бусики)	756 690
3	Расходы по проживанию администраторов	654 651
4	Канцтовары	37 706
5	Печатание схемы рассадки, формы неясности, речей, плакатов	18 650
6	Гонорары администраторов 348 чел.	2 335 850
7	Отчисления в Соц.Фонд и подоходный налог	1021229
8	Гонорары администраторов на позднем тестировании 6 чел.	5 120
9	Отчисления в Соц.Фонд и подоходный налог	2 238
10	Семинары для администраторов и лидеров 3 дня	96 692
11	Гонорары ассистентам по администрированию	5 268
12	Отчисления в Соц.Фонд и подоходный налог	2 303
13	Командировочные суточные (норма)	12 356
14	**ВСЕГО РАСХОДОВ**	**5 576 594**

5. Обработка и рассылка результатов тестирования

№	Статьи расходов	итого, сом
1	Бумага для сертификатов и печатание	179 695
2	Услуги связи (почта)	57 384
3	Конверты, пленка и др. канц.товары	2 000
4	Зар.плата дежурным консультантам	10 142
5	Отчисления в Соц.Фонд и подоходный налог	4 434
6	**ВСЕГО**	**253 655**

6. Информационная кампания

№	Статьи расходов	итого, сом
1	Размещение статей в газетах	127 644
2	Проведение пресс-конференций	
3	Информационные блоки (во время регистрации)	
4	Телевизионные, информ. передачи для абитуриентов и их родителей	
5	**ВСЕГО**	**127 644**

7. Мониторинг и распространение отчетов

№	Статьи расходов	итого, сом
1	Почтовые расходы	**8 884**
2	Производство отчетов по результатам тестирования	**218 386**
3	**ВСЕГО**	**227 270**

№	НАЛОГИ	
1	Автодороги, ФПЛЧС за 2008	34 606
2	**ИТОГО налогов**	**34 606**

Всего расходов по тестированию 12 611 772