Fundación Luksic

**POLICY BRIEF #2** | EDUCATION

# CLOSING GAPS BETWEEN PUBLIC POLICY AND END USERS

## Overcoming Information Asymmetries:

*End-user experiences in educational initiatives in Chile.*

REDES EDUCATIVAS PARA LA MEJORA DEL APRENDIZAJE (REMA)
ASPIRACIONES SOBRE EL FUTURO (ASF)





## INTRODUCTION

The concept of information asymmetries has been widely used in the context of the economy and the market, where two involved parties enter into a contract or economic exchange, but one of them possesses information that is unknown to the other party (Akerlof, 1970).

In the realm of education, this problem has arisen at various levels, being the selection of schools and higher education institutions the most studied, where students and their respective parents often confront an enormous amount of information that is challenging to handle and interpret. Specifically, information about the quality of "the offerent part" tends to be the most elusive, leading to situations where students and their parents often opt for institutions and programs that have been more successful in making themselves known, but that not necessarily represent a higher quality of education. As a study in the United Arab Emirates establishes, *"students finally spend more money and resources by selecting the low quality relevant academic program due to the lack of proper knowledge and judgment. Thus, information asymmetry in the educational market leads to poor selection of the program"* (Suri & Adnan, 2016, p.1).

At an organizational level, there are other types of asymmetries, expressed in the information gaps between central and local governments, and in the ability of the latter to keep up with the guidelines from the center. Ultimately, this problem undermines the effective delivery and implementation of public education policies (Wilkoszewski & Sundby, 2014).

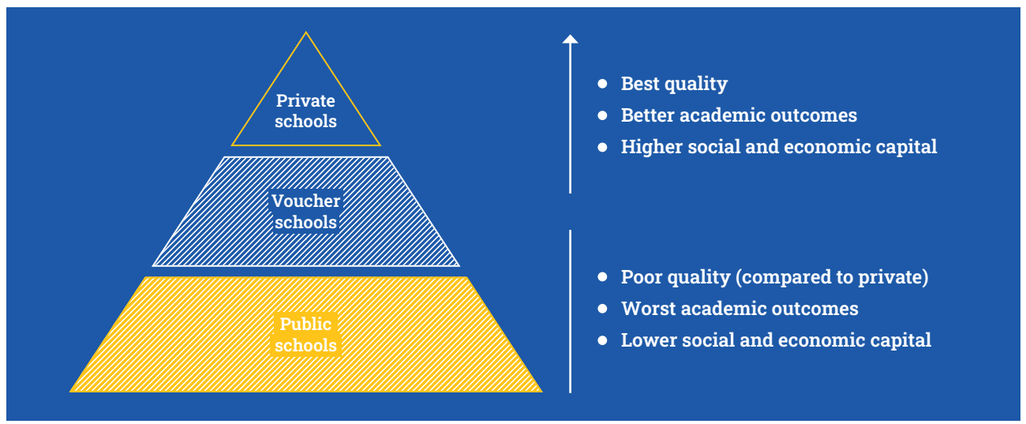
In the following policy brief we describe two initiatives which address information asymmetries in education in Chile: Educational Networks for Learning Improvement (REMA[1]) and Aspirations for the future (ASF[2]). These programs aim to overcome the disadvantages generated by information frictions at two levels; REMA at organizations and ASF at individuals. Our initiatives target vocational schools and students, as this population is specially affected by these disadvantages and frictions. Considering that one of the main issues with information asymmetries is the generation and perpetuation of disadvantages, overcoming gaps that begin early in life and continue to widen into adulthood is urgent in this population.

## CHILEAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND ITS INEQUALITIES

The Chilean system suffers from inequalities and segregation. According to international comparisons, the Chilean educational system exhibits the lowest level of socioeconomic heterogeneity and the highest level of segregation among OECD countries (OECD, 2019).

In Chile there are three types of schools: public, voucher and private. The figure 1 illustrates the Chilean model. Overall, public and voucher schools are associated with lower social and economic capital and worse academic performance (Zancajo, 2019).

FIGURE 1: STRATIFIED SCHOOL EDUCATION




[1] In Spanish, "Redes Educativas para la Mejora de Aprendizajes".
[2] In Spanish, "Aspiraciones Sobre el Futuro".

In public and voucher schools, after completing primary education, students can choose to continue their education in the academic (EMCH[3]) or vocational track (EMTP[4]). While students in the academic track continue under a comprehensive curriculum designed to prepare them for university, students in the vocational track specialize in work-oriented areas. Despite the vocational track representing only 35% of schools, almost 80% of the lowest income tier attend this type of education (See figures 2 and 3). In comparison with students from the academic track, they have less chances of pursuing higher education, less chances of finding jobs and are less likely to earn good salaries (Centro de Estudios Mineduc, 2020).

Furthermore, it has been shown that this education is insufficient for these students to successfully enter the workforce[5] and/or develop tools that ensure their economic sustainability in the future. In addition, only 40% of these graduates decide to continue into higher education[6], a path that could clearly enhance their chances of finding employment, thereby opening up opportunities for higher-paying jobs. In the case of Chile, evidence indicates that the average salary of those who complete a university degree is 2.3 times higher and the chances of finding employment are 15% more favorable (Casen 2017).

**FIGURE 2**

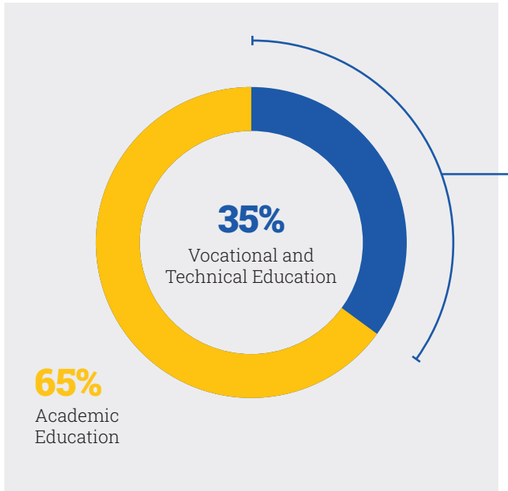
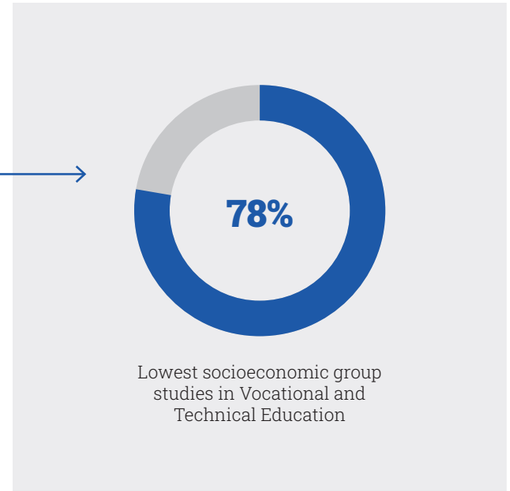



**FIGURE 3**




## THE LAST MILE OF PUBLIC POLICY AND THE USER EXPERIENCE

The existing information gaps between those who design and implement social policies, as well as between central and local governments, constitute a space for the reproduction of inequalities. Despite robust evidence regarding the importance of user interaction in social programs (LIP, 2017), public policies often focus their efforts on being impeccably designed, while neglecting implementation. This becomes evident when the design of public policies, carried out by central government administrations, disregards the execution of programs at the local level (Wilkoszewski & Sundby, 2014). It is due to this practical oversight that many social policies fall short of fulfilling their commitment to problem-solving and social transformation.

The political experience of different countries has highlighted this issue, such as the Prime Minister's delivery unit (DU) in the United Kingdom. In Tony Blair's administration in 2001, the British government became aware of the limitations faced by its public policies when trying to be properly executed by technical teams (Richards & Smith, 2006). In their case study, Richards & Smith (2006) quote Geoff Mulgan, the head of Blair's government policy unit, who presents his perspective on the matter: *"I always thought it was very dangerous for policy makers just to sit at the top of the hierarchy and push things down expecting that if you pull a lever something predictable will happen at the other end"* (p.334).

[3] In Spanish, "Educación Media Científico-humanista".
[4] In Spanish, "Educación Media Técnico-profesional".
[5] According to the data from the Ministry of Education (Mineduc) in 2020, the 2018's employment rate corresponding to the first year after graduation for vocational students was 7.8%.
[6] Data calculated by Fundación Luksic based on higher education enrollment data.





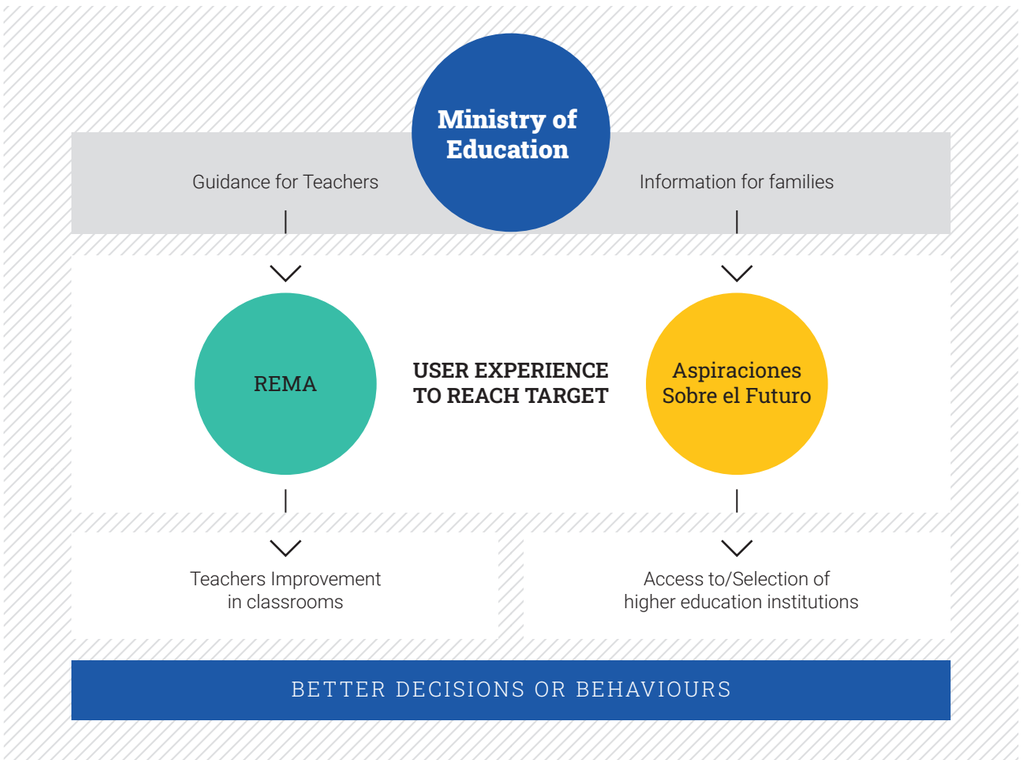
This perspective is reflected in the model of co-production with users in public services, initiated in the 1970s by Ostrom and adopted by various researchers and policy makers. The central idea of this theory suggests that without active user participation, the transformation of reality, the goal of any program, and therefore the actual implementation of the service, cannot be achieved (LIP, 2017).

Along these conceptions about the importance of implementation and the role of users, educational systems in various OECD countries are experiencing the decentralization of their structures and institutions, involving an increasing number of stakeholders and actors such as students, parents, teachers, principals and unions in education decision-making processes (Wilkoszewski & Sundby, 2014). That way, rigid distinctions between policy-makers and users of these policies become blurred (LIP, 2017); between central and local levels; and between public and private actors. This leads to a multi-level governance in educational systems (Wilkoszewski & Sundby, 2014).

It is within this context that various civil society organizations are called upon to engage in the governance of the educational system. In Chile, information and the guidelines for the educational system are led by the central government through the Ministry of Education, but policies do not always trickle down effectively to the local levels, presenting limitations in their implementation. Thus, the lack of attention to the delivery phase of social policies only exacerbates the inequality of the Chilean educational system and widens the information gap to the detriment of disadvantaged students, their families, and schools.

To collaborate on a solution to this shortcoming, the two programs designed and implemented by Fundación Luksic aim to narrow information gaps, and address limitations and inequities in the implementation of public policies in education. The programs focus on two different perspectives, on the one hand, REMA targets educational institutions with their respective administrators and teaching staff and, on the other hand, ASF targets students and their families. Both programs were designed considering a user experience approach, to reduce implementation difficulties and leverage their impact.

**FIGURE 4: FUNDACIÓN LUKSIC'S PROGRAMS WORKING ON THE INFORMATION GAP IN EDUCATION**

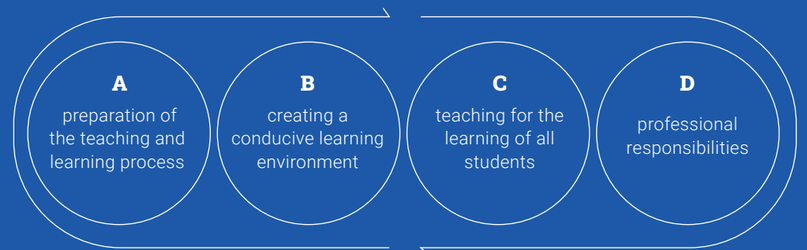


## CLOSING GAPS AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

In Chile, at the organizational level, information for managing improvements in the classroom exists and is available, but there is a gap in its utilization and application.

The main reference for teacher policies in the last decade is the "Framework for Good Teaching" (MBE[7]), which explicitly outlines everything a teacher should know and be able to do (Sevilla and Arévalo, 2020). The document, created in 2004, was updated in 2021 with the enactment of Law 20.903 and the establishment of the Professional Teacher Development System (SDPD[8]). As a result of this, the Ministry of Education identified the need for pedagogical and disciplinary standards for teaching careers and performance standards derived from the domains of the Framework, to guide, assess, and strengthen the profession (CPEIP, 2021).

**The domains presented by the Framework are:**




Additionally, the Ministry of Education provides a series of practical and theoretical resources for the application of these standards.

(CPEIP, 2021)

However, ministerial guidelines are not effectively incorporated into all educational establishments in the country, deepening a significant gap between the participation of Chilean teachers in professional development strategies and the international average. According to the Talis Study, teachers in Chile have lower levels of participation in teacher development strategies, such as teacher networks and mentoring or coaching; courses or workshops; visits to other schools; and in-service training than the international average (Centro de Estudios Mineduc, 2017).

**14%** of Chilean teachers report participating in these strategies, while the international participation average is 22%.

**55%** of Chilean teachers have participated in courses or workshops in the 12 months before the questionnaire, while the international average is 71%.

(Centro de Estudios Mineduc, 2017)

[7] In spanish, "Marco para la Buena Enseñanza".
[8] In Spanish, "Sistema de Desarrollo Profesional Docente".





This is particularly concerning considering that the teaching processes led by teachers, is identified as the main determinant of student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2019; Godoy, Varas, Martínez, Triviño, & Meyer, 2016). In this, international evidence suggests the need to focus improvement efforts—whether in teacher professional development, curriculum reforms, or pedagogical leadership—on teachers' pedagogical behavior in the classroom (Godoy et al., 2016).

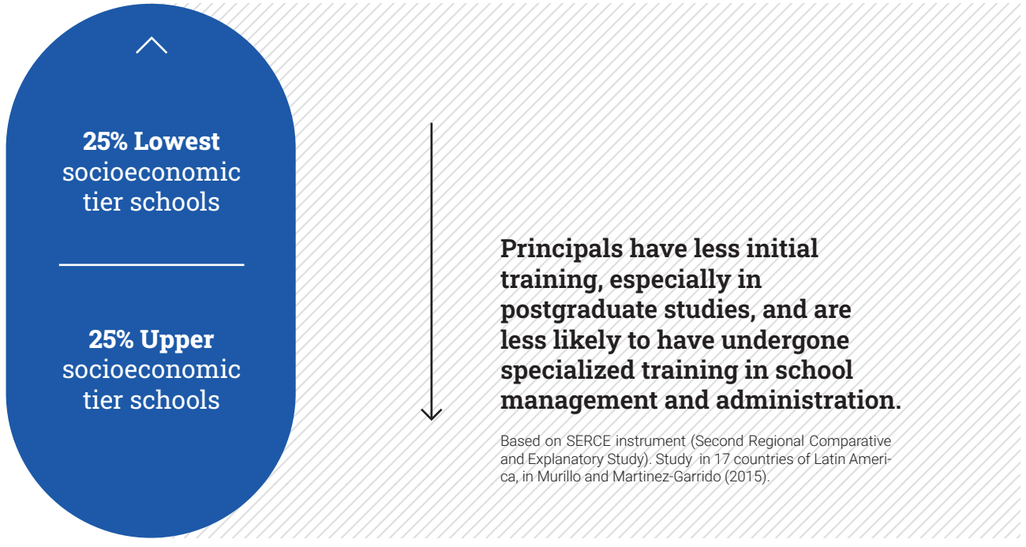
**In the case of vocational schools, challenges increase as neither the Framework for Good Teaching (MBE) nor the Professional Teacher Development System (SDPD) incorporate indicators or strategies that address the vocational reality.**

According to Sevilla and Arévalo (2020), this situation leads Technical-Professional or Vocational Education teachers to face the recognition process for career progression and new assignments under unequal conditions compared to academic teachers. The same authors argue that the attraction of new vocational teachers and the retention of those already in service becomes more complex, having a negative effect on the quality of vocational student learning. This occurs due to their salaries being affected by the SDPD, which does not consider their special characteristics and does not address their training needs. Recent studies indicate that it is precisely in EMTP where novice teachers (with less than 3 years of experience) have the highest attrition rates (38%), exceeding the average rate in the school system by up to 20% (Sevilla and Arévalo, 2020).

For principals, the Framework for Good School Management and Leadership (MBDLE[9]) defines the practices, skills and knowledge for school leadership development. This framework establishes that leadership teams must, among other things, constantly work to understand, improve and enhance teachers' capabilities, personal skills and motivation. It also establishes that they should lead teaching and learning processes in their educational establishments (CPEIP, 2015).

School leadership is one of the most significant factors influencing student learning, as they act as a catalyst for good classroom practices (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2019). However, as shown in figure 5, it has been found that in schools with lower levels of socioeconomic and cultural capital there is a gap in the preparation of principals and teachers compared to more advantaged institutions (Murillo and Martínez-garrido, 2015; Centro de Estudios Mineduc, 2017). Considering all this, principals are key agents in any intervention related to most disadvantaged students' learning outcomes.

**FIGURE 5: INEQUALITY IN THE TRAINING OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS BY SOCIOECONOMIC LEVEL IN LATIN AMERICA**




[9] In Spanish, "Marco para la buena dirección y el liderazgo escolar".

## REMA

The Educational Networks for Learning Improvement program (REMA), promoted by Fundación Luksic, is a high-touch intervention, which means that it is an intensive intervention with direct interaction with the participants. The program aims at enhancing the learning outcomes of vocational students in Chile by strengthening the teaching staff and their leaders' performance. This intervention aligns with the declarations of public policy regarding teacher professional development, pedagogical leadership, and effective classroom interactions, as outlined in reference documents such as the Framework for Good Teaching (CPEIP, 2021), and the Teacher Evaluation Portfolio, used for SDPD (CPEIP, 2021), and the Framework for Good School Management and Leadership (Mineduc, 2015).
While there are structural elements in the education system where civil society cannot directly intervene, there is room to promote improvements in factors related to teaching performance and leadership. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, these factors are two of the most decisive elements in improving student learning (Leithwood et al., 2019; Godoy et al., 2016). In this regard, the program focuses its efforts on two pathways: first, to address and promote teacher well-being and pedagogical leadership of school administrators; and second, but equally important, to enhance teacher interactions in the classroom through observation and feedback on their practices. For both objectives, the program is supported by a perspective of continuous improvement, where deficient practices are valued and leveraged for improvement. This methodology has proven to be effective within educational institutions, both nationally and internationally (Bryk, 2021).

### Improvement methodology

As outlined by Bryk (2021), school learning communities are one of the strategies of the improvement methodology. This approach encourages teachers to become active agents of change by identifying and resolving the everyday challenges faced by their educational institutions. The methodology is based on six fundamental principles: focus on the problem and the user, organize as networks, learn Improvement methodology through disciplined research, appreciate measurement, observe the entire system, and pay attention to variability.

Collaborative coaching, walkthrough processes, and collective cycle of continuous improvement are some of the elements worked on under this methodology, which has been developed since the 1990s (Bryk, 2021).

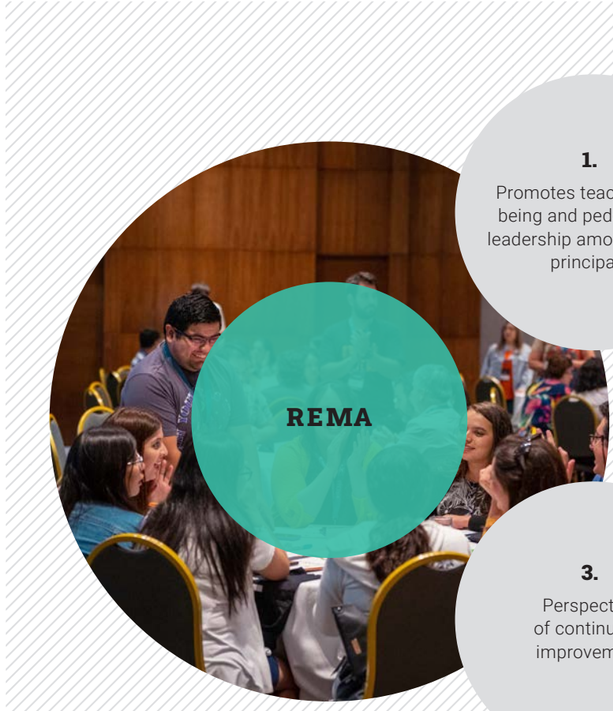




REMA promotes the improvement of **organizational behaviour** through the implementation of public policy guidance participation and engagement of key stakeholders in education. The program has a duration of three years, during which schools are intensively supported by the Foundation and its collaborating partners (CENTRE UC) for two years, with observation and feedback provided to participating teachers. The third year is designed for the observation and feedback practices to be transferred to the schools and then autonomously implemented by them.

In REMA, the interventions include monthly meetings with the entire school team, classroom recordings, teacher feedback, and joint sessions with other schools. All these activities are carried out in a participatory manner, always considering the teacher's protagonism and leadership. Additionally, the program has developed a series of practical tools that consolidate the knowledge and expertise gained over these three years. The tools were designed considering the teacher/ user experience approach and included a service-design consultancy to assist in the elaboration of practical tools. These tools are condensed into four free and open documents for the educational community, featuring methodologies, techniques, and simple exercises applicable in classrooms (Fundación Luksic, 2023).

**FIGURE 6: REMA'S COMPONENTS**



## CLOSING GAPS AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

In Chile, at the individual level, information about higher education and funding opportunities is available for students that are ending school, but there is a gap in its utilization and application.

A diagnostic study made by Fundación Luksic (2022) shows a students' lack of knowledge on some important features of the Chilean higher education system. The results indicate that 73% of students claim to know very little or nothing about financing higher education opportunities, and 65% state the same about the salaries and employability of recent graduates. To assess the actual knowledge of students about higher education, some closed-ended questions were asked, and their responses are consistent with the questions recently described:

**59%**

of students correctly answer that the "Socioeconomic Accreditation Form" (FUAS[10]) is a tool for applying for state financing benefits.

**5%**

of surveyed students are knowledgeable about the requirements for accessing "The Free Higher Education Program[11]".

**47%**

correctly identify that the website with the key dates for entering higher education is acceso.mineduc.cl.

The lack of knowledge in this matter is concerning. In Chile, a program was implemented that guarantees free higher education to all students coming from the bottom 60% of the income distribution.

**While a significant portion of EMTP students no longer face the challenge of funding their higher education studies, the percentage of EMTP students who apply and enroll in universities, Technical Training Centers (CFTs), or Professional Institutes (IPs) in the year following high school graduation is lower than that of students from traditional academic track[12] (Centro de Estudios Mineduc, 2020).**

Low applications for higher education are also influenced by the expectations that vocational schools have on their students. Historically, vocational education has been seen as preparation from the labour market, which means that continuing to higher education is not a priority in many of these institutions. In addition, these students tend to achieve lower scores on standardized math and reading tests. This combination of characteristics results in lower expectations on pursuing a path leading to higher education, and consequently, fewer applications to universities and vocational training centers (Barrios, Eluchans & Ramírez, 2023).

[10] In Spanish, "Formulario Único de Acreditación Socioeconómica".
[11] In Spanish, "Gratuidad".
[12] In 2017, 43.8% of vocational graduates entered higher education within one year of graduation, compared to 63.8% of academic graduates.





**The abundance of available information presents us with a new kind of information asymmetry problem: :** Who selects the information? Is it up-to-date? Is it accurate? Additionally, individuals with higher cultural and social capital are better equipped to select information and make improved decisions. This perpetuates the reproduction of social, cultural, and economic advantages and disadvantages. We not only have an enormous amount of information, but it is overwhelming for most individuals due to the inability to process it, and moreover it remains inaccessible to many.

## ASF

At Fundación Luksic, we support young people in making decisions about their future. The Aspirations for the Future program (ASF) was launched in 2021 with the aim of helping vocational students make informed decisions about their educational future. Access to better and more extensive information is essential when deciding which path to take, a crucial decision at that point in their lives that significantly impacts their future (Slack et al., 2014).

The information available for students and their families has been analyzed from various perspectives. On the one hand, it has been studied from the perspective of the efficiency of the higher education market that could depend on the available information regarding the academic quality of institutions (Suri et al., 2016). In terms of students´ academic performance, reducing the information gap that parents have about their children has shown positive effects. A study conducted in the United States concluded that sending text messages to parents indicating academic monitoring of their children (grades, school absences, etc.) improved grades and academic performance. This same intervention (text messages) along with parental engagement through home visits had an even greater effect (Oreopoulos and Ford, 2016).

Finally, an intervention targeted directly to students demonstrated an improvement in the access of low-income students to universities, due to an intervention that included a "counselor" who could mediate between them and the financial

aid they could qualify for, advising them in the application process (Owen and Westlund, 2016). ASF also looks for improving the access to higher education, and has many aspects in common with this last intervention.

As shown in Figure 7, the most updated version of ASF program consists of four components: two aimed at students and two at educational institutions. For the design of these components, a combined approach was considered, integrating a low-touch intervention strategy, which is light-weighted and low cost but with moderate effects, with a high-touch strategy, which is intensive and more costly, involving direct interaction with participants and having a stronger impact.

**FIGURE 7: ASPIRACIONES SOBRE EL FUTURO COMPONENTS**






The program considers a user experience approach. The design was carried out in a participatory manner, incorporating the perspective of the individual students and members of educational institutions to ensure their engagement and interest in the program.

The low touch intervention aimed at students consists of an information package. On the one hand, the package highlights funding opportunities and benefits of attending higher education. On the other hand, it highlights higher education programs' information tailored to each student according to their preferences, which are obtained by a survey answered by them.

The high-touch intervention aimed at students includes a mentorship program for a group of them, designed to reinforce the information given in the package and to guide students throughout the college application process.

Regarding the components aimed at schools, the program involves sending personalized reports to participating institutions with the survey results, and a transfer component designed to strengthen counseling capacities of the participating schools. This last component has been piloted since 2022 and adjusted according to school participants' feedback.


## RESULTS OF OUR INTERVENTIONS

While there is still a journey ahead, our programs are already showing encouraging results, both **in the organizational behavior of schools, as well as** in the **individual decisions of students and their families.**

On the one hand, REMA's implementation evaluation shows promising results. Based on the information gathered from interviews and observations, the robustness of the program is evident in terms of its theoretical, methodological, and practical content. The program's observation and feedback methodology is acknowledged by the beneficiaries as a legitimate and appropriate foundation for characterizing, modifying, and enriching pedagogical practices in the classroom.

On the other hand, ASF's impact evaluation (applied on the first version of the program carried on in 2021 over the two components aimed at students) shows that providing information and mentoring increases students' probability of registering and taking the college admission exam by 12.8 percentage points, of applying for funding by 10.3 percentage points, and of enrolling in higher education by 4.7 percentage points (Barrios et al., 2023).

FIGURE 8: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF REMA AND ASPIRACIONES SOBRE EL FUTURO


The **robustness of the program** is evident in terms of its theoretical, methodological, and practical content.

The **program's observation and feedback methodology** is acknowledged by the beneficiaries as a **legitimate and appropriate foundation for characterizing, modifying, and enriching pedagogical** practices in the classroom.


**12.8**
percentage points higher probability of **registering and taking the college admission exam.**

**10.3**
percentage points higher probability of **applying for funding.**

**4.7**
percentage points higher probability of **enrolling in higher education.**

**In order to guarantee our interventions' quality and effectiveness, our programs are insert in an evaluation cycle which ensures their constant review, and where the user experience approach is essential. At Fundación Luksic, we believe that the role of intermediation between State policies and end users in Chile has been systematically underestimated, widening information gaps and exacerbating inequalities. For this reason, REMA and ASF were designed and executed to narrow information gaps, and address limitations and inequities in the implementation of public policies in education.**





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