

Executive Summary

The report *Improving schools: strategies for action in Mexico* aims to help education authorities in Mexico and other OECD countries to strengthen their education systems. It focuses on policies to improve teaching, school management and leadership across schools so as to improve children's attainment in basic education. The report develops a comparative framework of the key policy levers for successful schools and school systems and adapts it to the context and reality of Mexico.

Placing *Mexican schools and students' success at the centre* of education policy making, the fifteen recommendations in the report set out an action-oriented policy agenda for schools, directors and teachers to receive better support to accomplish their tasks in Mexico. The recommendations propose the following:

- Enhancing the role of teachers requires setting clear standards of practice; ensuring high quality initial teacher preparation (ITP) programmes; attracting better candidates; professionalising the recruitment, selection and evaluation of teachers; and linking teachers and their professional development more directly to schools' needs.
- Strengthening leadership and management requires setting clear school director standards; providing training; professionalising recruitment; supporting school autonomy; and ensuring social participation. Schools also need to be better supported with stable sources of funding that respond to their specific needs.

Conditions for success in education reform: Countries can substantially improve educational outcomes in a relatively short period of time – from a few years to a single generation. Yet making significant improvements to system-wide educational outcomes is a complex task that requires a multi-faceted approach. At the core are policies that focus on improving teaching and learning, including curriculum, teaching skills, leadership and assessment. At the same time, policy design must take into account the context and possibilities for implementation.

The analysis of high performing education systems' policies and practices shows that there are some core assumptions that can guide governments: clear goals, with public understanding and support; a strong focus on recruiting, developing and retaining excellent people (teachers and leaders) in the system; institutions and infrastructure to support educational improvement: accountability and reporting systems that support the government goals and provide professional and objective information on outcomes; and a focus on the work of individual schools, which is where teaching and learning take place.

To address these conditions is a challenge in any country. Improvements across an entire education system can only come with strong, consistent political support and leadership sustained over time. It requires years, but examples from successful countries show that with persistence and thought it can be done.

Working towards education reform in Mexico: Improving the quality of education is a political and social priority in Mexico, especially in recent times, with higher poverty rates, high inequality and more criminal activity. While there has been educational improvement and an increased focus on education policy in recent years, 66% of young people aged 15-19 are not in school and student achievement is not sufficient to provide the skills Mexico needs, with one in two 15-year-olds not reaching the baseline level 2 in PISA (OECD average of 19.2% in 2006). School days are short, with insufficient effective teaching time, and teaching and leadership quality and support are weak in many schools.

Structural challenges remain: a lack of capacity, unclear distribution of responsibilities across a decentralised system, and structural conditions and processes that do not favour schools being at the centre of education policy. Schools operate with sparse resources that need to be distributed better and more effectively across

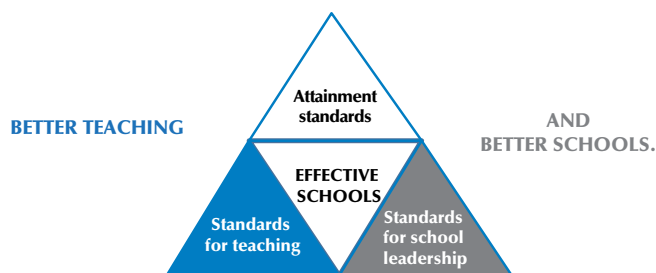
schools, and a complex interaction between different actors within the education system requires more institutionalised ways to ensure discussions and consensus-building.

Mexico needs to develop a long-term education strategy to ensure higher levels of skills and knowledge to facilitate economic growth and better living conditions for many Mexicans. One of the first conditions should be to establish a small number of clear, high priority, measurable goals focused on: improving student attainment, reducing drop-out rates, ensuring timely graduation (*egreso oportuno*) and reducing inequalities across the education system. The key initial point of reform is the need to place Mexican schools and students at the centre of education policy making. Improving Mexican schools will require a rethink of the governance of the system and the roles of school leaders and teachers, to enable them to focus on supporting all children and young people to achieve their full learning potential.

To ensure progress in policy design and implementation, it can help to: provide venues for ongoing dialogue and communication among all relevant stakeholders; ensure the alignment of actors and policies; revise the structures that will be delivering reforms; match the focus on educating, training, developing and supporting the educator workforce with policy decisions and resources; address the development of national, regional and local capacity building for better school management; and continue developing reliable sources of information for evaluation and improvement.

The following 15 recommendations propose an action-oriented strategy for schools, directors and teachers to receive better support to improve school and student results.

RAISE STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH ...



1. Define effective teaching
2. Attract the best recruits
3. Strengthen initial teacher preparation
4. Improve initial teacher assessment
5. Open all posts to competition
6. Create induction/probation periods
7. Improve professional development
8. Evaluate to help improve
9. Define effective school leadership
10. Professionalise training and appointment of directors
11. Build instructional leadership capacity in and across schools
12. Enhance school autonomy
13. Ensure funding for all schools
14. Strengthen social participation
15. Create an Implementation Working Committee

Teacher career paths – consolidate a quality profession: The single most important policy reform Mexico can make to improve education outcomes for its young people is to build a powerful system to recruit, prepare, evaluate and develop the best teachers for its schools. Eight recommendations *for better teaching* suggest a comprehensive strategy both to improve the conditions under which many teachers work and to attract, prepare and develop a higher quality teaching force. They follow a teacher's trajectory from initial training through to permanent status as a full professional, when professional development and evaluation become important elements.

1. **Define effective teaching:** Mexico needs to develop and implement a clear set of coherent aligned teaching standards that signal to the profession and to society at large the core knowledge, skills and values associated with effective teaching.

2. **Attract best recruits into teaching:** If teaching is to acquire the status of a fully-fledged profession in Mexico, the first step must be to improve the calibre of applicants to initial teacher education institutions, especially, but not exclusively, at the Teachers' Colleges (*Normales*). One way to achieve this is to raise the bar for entry into initial teacher preparation (ITP) programmes and to establish a national entrance screening exam and other assessment tools.

3. **Strengthen initial teacher preparation:** Public and private Teachers' Colleges (*Normales*) and other institutions running programmes of initial teacher preparation (ITP) need to be substantially improved if they are going to remain the country's principal vehicle for preparing its teachers. The first step should be to put in place a set of rigorous accreditation standards for all *Normales* and other teacher training institutions.

4. **Improve initial teacher assessment:** Mexico should further develop and improve the new teacher licensing examination (*Concurso*); continue introducing the use of more authentic and performance-based means of assessing the knowledge and skills of teachers; ensure a minimum level of attainment for all candidate teachers; and improve the governance structure and, in particular, the operation of the Independent Federalist Evaluation Unit (*Organismo de Evaluación Independiente con Carácter Federalista*, OEIF), while looking for an efficient long term strategy.

5. **Open all teaching posts to competition:** All teacher posts (including vacancies) should be open for competition, given that at present some are allocated through the mixed commissions and others through the licensing examination (*Concurso*). The system for allocating teachers to schools, currently based on teacher choice, should be improved so that there is a better match between schools and teachers. The *Sistema de Corrimiento* should be kept and improved.

6. **Create induction/probation periods:** As the first years of practice are key to teaching quality, and there are concerns about ITP and the initial selection of teachers, it is important to implement a formal induction period with substantial support for all beginning teachers (including those with non-permanent posts) and a probation period for beginning teachers to demonstrate in practice that they are capable of effectively facilitating student learning and successfully undertaking other aspects of their teacher roles.

7. **Improve professional development:** The current supply of professional development is dispersed across a range of different providers and organisations and teachers say that the courses offered to them may not be relevant to their needs. Many teachers fund their own choices beyond the courses offered by the government and the states. Development options should be diversified and made more coherent and relevant to school needs. Current efforts to make the National Training Catalogue more relevant should continue; and school-based training opportunities should be increased and supported.

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- 8. Evaluate to help improve:** A standards-based teacher evaluation system is urgently needed in Mexico. This should be a purely formative system in its first years with adequate professional support opportunities. Once it is implemented and its rules are socialised, it can include formative and summative consequences, including rewarding excellent teachers and supporting less well-performing teachers. Teachers who are persistently poor performers should be excluded from the education system.

Improve school effectiveness: leadership, management and social participation: Together with teaching, the quality of school leadership and management is key in raising the attainment of students. But instructional leadership and appropriate support to schools is not a prominent feature of Mexican schools. Directors do not have appropriate training, development, incentives and support to focus on improving the quality of instruction and schools' results, and on strengthening the school's links to the community. The following six recommendations *for better schools* suggest a strategy for schools in Mexico to provide adequate learning and teaching environments for students and teachers. They focus on building a leadership profession, reducing inequities between schools serving richer and poorer communities, simplifying funding arrangements, and providing greater accountability and responsiveness to the community.

- 9. Define effective school leadership:** As with teachers, Mexico needs to define clear leadership and management standards to signal to the profession, and to society at large, the core knowledge, skills, and values associated with effective school directors.
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- 10. Professionalise training and appointment of directors:** Leadership development needs to be seen as a continuum. This implies encouraging leadership initial training; organising induction programmes; and ensuring in-service training to cover need and context. Having a framework of leadership standards will make it possible to use the evaluation of directors to diagnose what key skills may be required in individual cases and find suitable opportunities to acquire them. Appointments for directors should, where possible, be made from a shortlist of selected candidates, all of whom are qualified in terms of meeting the standards.
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- 11. Build instructional leadership capacity in and across schools:** Mexican schools generally work as independent units and therefore many have only limited capacity to undertake high quality school-based professional development, among other management tasks. Schools where good and high quality practice exists need to share with schools that have limited capacity for self-improvement. Otherwise, schools will continue doing only what they already know how to do and will have very limited chances of improving.
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- 12. Enhance school autonomy:** To professionalise and hold leaders accountable, school leaders need also to participate in the key decisions that take place at their school, such as hiring or dismissing teachers. Decision structures that are adapted to schools' contexts can also have a positive impact on their achievement.
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- 13. Ensure funding for all schools:** In practice, schools have virtually no autonomy and no funds to allocate, and there are differences between the resources available to schools in rich and poor communities. Distribution of resources should be more equity-based, and should avoid imposing unaffordable bureaucratic burdens on schools.
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- 14. Strengthen social participation:** School councils can be an important asset to improve school quality, but merely creating them will not result in effective social partnerships. School councils need real influence over things that matter, as well as information, training and transparency.

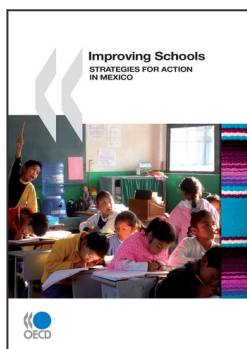
Guidance on implementation: To ensure that these recommendations complete the transitions from OECD to Mexico, it is necessary that a national group of stakeholders reflects on and takes ownership and adapts them. It is critical to engage all key players as full partners in implementing these recommendations. For example, different states can take the lead on various aspects of the recommendations, and build mechanisms to learn

from one another rather than each having to start from the beginning. Additionally, the recommendations are consistent with the goals outlined in the National Educational Sector Plan 2007-2012 and the Alliance for Quality Education. The Ministry and other education stakeholders have a strong stake in creating a much stronger professional teaching culture in Mexico. Making the best use of current initiatives to align with these recommendations can provide extra leverage for change.

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- 15. Create an Implementation Working Committee:** To reflect on and propose implementation strategies, a committee should be composed of relevant policy makers from the Ministry of Education, and also include highly respected members from academia, representatives from teachers and civil society. Its main tasks should be to develop a specific plan of implementation, taking into consideration the priorities and existing initiatives in Mexico and in coordination with the states. The OECD Steering Group recommends that the Ministry empower the Working Committee to establish work groups, for example in the following initial areas, each with a clear charge to develop a work plan with timelines and budget: 1) Standards for teaching and school and system leadership; 2) The Teachers Colleges (*Normales*) and other ITP institutions; 3) Teacher development and evaluation; 4) School directors and mentor teachers; 5) Autonomy, School funding, school partnerships and social participation.

Education reform is too important to the future of Mexico to be left to educators alone. The OECD encourages also the creation of a broader “guiding coalition” of top political, corporate, university and civil society leaders that will step forward and take responsibility for championing these reforms in the public arena, advocating for adequate and equitable funding, and holding key education stakeholders accountable for results.

Without a highly skilled and motivated workforce of teachers and school leaders capable of dramatically improving outcomes for Mexico’s young people, the nation’s ability to increase economic opportunity and social mobility will be severely compromised. Failure to invest in the comprehensive reforms the Steering Group is recommending in teacher policy and school leadership would, in the long run, be much more costly to Mexico’s future than the investments it is recommending now.



From:
Improving Schools
Strategies for Action in Mexico

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264087040-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2010), "Executive Summary", in *Improving Schools: Strategies for Action in Mexico*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264087040-2-en>

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