

CHAPTER 2

Working Towards Education Improvement in Mexico

Improving the quality of education needs to be a political and social priority in Mexico. Higher levels of skills can contribute to strengthening social cohesion, development and economic growth. This chapter reviews the main achievements in the system, but also the challenges currently facing Mexico and the main reforms the country has fostered in basic education to overcome them. The last section reviews some of the conditions and pathways that can contribute to success in implementing much-needed reforms in Mexico.

Its main conclusion is that in order to ensure all children and young people achieve their full learning potential and improve their results, there is a need to place Mexican schools and students at the centre of education policy making. Therefore schools, directors and teachers need to be better supported and prepared to accomplish their tasks and key education stakeholders need to align all their resources towards this goal.

Improving education is challenging for any country and Mexico is no exception. Reforming a large education system such as Mexico's is a complex task and it is difficult to find a set of prescriptions that will guarantee success. Furthermore, education reforms take time to be implemented and need strong public support.

The Mexican population is one of the largest in the OECD, and its socio-economic characteristics make Mexico one of the OECD countries facing the biggest educational challenges. However, it also has strong potential for improvement. Despite its multiple challenges, the OECD Steering Group on School Management and Teacher Policy in Mexico is convinced – and has sufficient evidence to confirm – that Mexico has the political and social will and capacity to respond to the need to improve education for all Mexican children.

Improving the quality and equity of the Mexican education system and helping all students to succeed should be the national priority for society. There are several arguments – social, economic, legal and strategic – that support this goal. Many of these will be analysed in this and the following chapters. There are also some important issues to consider. Several indicators show that growing inequity, increasing outbreaks of violence and limited economic growth render Mexico's development processes vulnerable. In this context, a well planned, long-standing strategy to improve the education system, to which all actors are aligned, is not only essential, but also urgently needed.

This chapter summarises the analysis of the Steering Group regarding the current situation, context, key actors and policy reforms currently in progress, together with the guiding conditions and principles for long-standing education improvement in Mexico. While not pretending to be a road map for policy implementation, it presents some of the key conditions within the education system that need further development to bring about improvement in both the mid and long term. Two main overriding principles can be kept in mind throughout this report:

1. In spite of the multiple challenges and numerous existing strategies to respond to these, Mexico's efforts need to focus on a single goal: that **all children and young people achieve their full learning potential**. In fact this should be the main goal of any education system. To achieve this in the complex Mexican education system described in this chapter, the OECD Mexico Steering Group recommends establishing a small number of clear, highest priority and measurable aims focused on improving the learning of all students, and directing all efforts towards achieving these. The specific aims should be to improve student attainment, reduce drop-out, ensure timely graduation (*egreso oportuno*) and reduce inequalities across the education system.
2. The need to recognise that **the implementation of any policy is embedded in a complex environment**. Many of these changes are about education conditions, but others are related to the more general political, economic, and social national (and international) dynamics. The OECD Mexico Steering Group recognises that the authorities and key educational players face multiple challenges.

This chapter presents the context and progress of reforms in Mexico and concludes that to support all children and young people to improve their educational attainment, there is a need **to place Mexican schools and students at the centre of the education policy making**. Policies need to concentrate on how to improve and support teachers, directors and schools in contributing to this goal, and key Mexican education stakeholders need to align their resources towards it.

EDUCATION CAN FOSTER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS

Mexico is a country with much potential to provide improved living conditions for its population. In recent decades it has taken its place among other industrialised countries in the OECD. However, with a GDP per capita of 14 500 USD in 2008, Mexico has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the OECD. It has the highest percentage of people living in poverty among OECD countries (more than 25% of the total population), and is only in 53rd position in the International Human Development Index (OECD, 2008; OECD, 2009a; OECD Statistics Portal, 2010; UNDP, 2009). In addition, Mexico's population is comparatively young, with children accounting for around half of all those living in poverty, and this may have lasting consequences.

In the past 20 years, Mexico's economy has not performed according to its potential compared to the activity and dynamism of other emerging economies. Efforts have been made to address this and need to be continued: if Mexico does not succeed in raising its long-term growth rate, it will take many generations to reach a standard of living comparable to other OECD countries. Some of the improvements need to focus on improving productivity growth. This involves different policy measures, such as those targeted at encouraging competition, improving the regulatory framework, and improving human capital by strengthening educational outcomes. These measures can increase the potential for productivity growth and improve the environment for investment (OECD, 2009d; OECD, 2010a).

In addition, in recent years, higher poverty rates, high inequalities and more criminal activity have made it even more of a priority to develop good quality public education by placing the school at the core of the system and supporting teachers to develop as professionals who believe in their work and have the tools they need to carry it out.

It is also true that education policy reforms can have only limited success if they are not accompanied by greater equity in income distribution or access to other opportunities for social development. Table 2.1 presents a comparative overview of social progress. It shows that, while there have been some improvements in reducing child mortality, improving health, raising skills and school attainment, there are still issues that need to be targeted, such as an increase in crime levels and the worsening well-being of the population. Education can not only contribute to economic growth, but also to improving equity in society and reducing poverty over the long run, and has also been associated with lower crime rates (OECD, 2007a; OECD, 2007b; OECD, 2008; OECD, 2009e; OECD, 2010a).

Table 2.1

Relative progress in social indicators across OECD countries, 2000-2006

| | Self-sufficiency | | Equity | | Health | | Social cohesion | | Income |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | Employment to population ratio, total | Share of students with insufficient reading competences | Gini coefficient of income inequality | Gender wage gap | Life expectancy at age 65, men | Infant mortality | Subjective well-being | Crime victimisation | Real GDP per capita |
| | Change 2007/2003 | Change 2006/2003 | Change 2004-05/2000 | Change 2006/early 2000s | Change 2006/2000 | Change 2006/2000 | Change 2006/2000 | Change 2005/2000 | Change 2006/2000 |
| Australia | ↑ | → | ↑ | ↓ | ↑ | ↓ | → | ↑ | → |
| Austria | → | → | - | → | → | → | ↓ | → | → |
| Belgium | → | → | - | - | ↑ | → | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ |
| Canada | → | → | ↓ | → | → | ↓ | ↓ | → | → |
| Czech Republic | → | ↓ | ↓ | → | → | → | → | - | ↑ |
| Denmark | → | ↑ | → | → | → | → | → | → | → |
| Finland | ↑ | ↑ | → | → | ↑ | → | ↑ | ↑ | → |
| France | ↓ | ↓ | → | ↓ | ↑ | → | → | ↑ | ↓ |
| Germany | ↑ | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | → | ↑ | → | ↓ |
| Greece | ↑ | → | ↑ | - | → | ↑ | → | - | ↑ |
| Hungary | ↓ | → | → | ↑ | ↓ | ↑ | ↓ | - | ↑ |
| Iceland | → | → | - | - | ↓ | → | - | - | ↑ |
| Ireland | ↑ | → | - | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | → | - | ↑ |
| Italy | → | ↓ | ↓ | - | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | → | ↓ |
| Japan | → | ↑ | - | ↓ | → | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | ↓ |
| Korea | ↓ | ↑ | - | → | ↑ | → | → | - | ↑ |
| Luxembourg | ↓ | → | → | - | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↓ | → |
| Mexico | → | ↑ | ↑ | - | ↓ | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| Netherlands | → | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | → | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ |
| New Zealand | ↑ | → | → | ↓ | → | → | - | → | → |
| Norway | → | ↓ | ↓ | - | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | → |
| Poland | ↑ | ↑ | - | ↑ | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| Portugal | ↓ | ↓ | - | - | → | ↑ | ↓ | → | ↓ |
| Slovakia | ↑ | ↓ | - | - | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | - | ↑ |
| Spain | ↑ | ↓ | - | - | → | → | → | ↑ | → |
| Sweden | → | → | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | → | ↑ | → |
| Switzerland | ↓ | ↑ | - | → | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| Turkey | ↓ | ↑ | - | - | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | - | ↑ |
| United Kingdom | ↓ | ↓ | ↑ | ↑ | → | ↓ | → | → | → |
| United States | ↓ | → | ↓ | ↑ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | → |

Note: The arrows describe changes in performance over time. The dark blue arrows pointing up denote countries in the top three deciles of performance, grey arrows pointing down denote those in the bottom three deciles of performance, and light blue arrows pointing to the right are those in the middle four deciles of performance.

Source: OECD (2009), *Society at a Glance 2009: OECD Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

To further support economic growth and improve the living conditions of the population, one of the key areas to focus on in Mexico is the strengthening of basic education provision. Often, in times of crisis it is social expenditure that is sacrificed to support expenditure in other public sectors. However, from a long-term development perspective it is important to continue with social investments such as nutrition, health and education to promote social mobility and allow citizens to move out of poverty and towards a high skills growth path. Cuts in these expenditures during crises have had a negative impact on educational and health outcomes, leading to lower growth (OECD, 2009c). Public support in these areas is especially important, as vulnerable households cannot be protected against the consequences of crisis and these can have permanent losses in the human capital of the poor, as has been demonstrated. Therefore education reforms targeted on improving children's attainment need to continue, even more so in the current economic environment of low growth, when it becomes more important to continue investing in education.

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES FACING THE MEXICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Many economic and social factors make it necessary to improve Mexico's education system, and progress has been made in the right direction.

The Mexican education system has grown rapidly from less than one million students in 1950 to more than 30 million students by 2000. Today's enrolment rate of children aged 5 to 14 is almost universal (Aguerrondo, Benavides and Pont, 2009; OECD, 2010b). Mexico has also seen some progress in ensuring that young people leave school with strong baseline qualifications. The proportion of students graduating at upper secondary level has risen from 33% in 2000 to 44% in 2008, reducing the upper secondary attainment gap between Mexico and other OECD countries. This progress has been achieved despite a context of tight budgets, rapid growth of the school-age population, great linguistic diversity, sizable internal and cross-border migration, and a considerable proportion of the population – 15% – living on less than 2 USD per day.

Some progress has also been made at the state level: over the last ten years, the gap has narrowed between rich and poor states on the numbers of students that drop-out or repeat a school year, but also regarding students who complete their education without dropping out. Yet because progress was concentrated in primary education, differences in achievement and enrolment remain large between states in secondary education.

Education reform activity has taken place in the last 20 years, much of it starting with the National Agreement for Modernising Basic and Normal Education (*Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica y Normal*) signed in 1992 between federal and state authorities. This agreement was built mainly upon three lines of action: the reorganisation of the education system, the reformulation of curriculum and education materials, and the revaluation of the teaching profession (Zorrilla, 2008). This agreement was the beginning of a decentralisation process for education and was mainly considered as a strategy to improve efficiency and efficacy in educational expenditure by reducing costs and diversifying financing sources (Fierro Evans, Tapia García and Rojo Pons, 2010).

Decentralisation meant that the states took over the operation of those basic education services that were previously conducted by the central government. This included operation of the federal pre-school, primary and secondary levels, and the Teachers' Colleges (*Normales*), indigenous and special education. Therefore each state had to add these federal services to those state-based ones that were already their responsibility (Zorrilla and Villalever, 2003). By 2009, 28 of the 31 Mexican states had an Education Ministry or Department (*Secretaría de Educación Estatal*) to manage their education systems, and another three states – Aguascalientes, Oaxaca and Quintana Roo – created decentralised institutes. The education services in the Federal District were not decentralised and they continue to be managed at the federal level, with its "minister" of education appointed by the federal Minister of Education.

The decentralisation of education services has not, however, evolved into a completely consolidated institutionalised education system. While formally the different functions are clearly defined, in practice federal and state-level institutions sometimes overlap or interact in uncoordinated ways. In ten states, there is still a ministry and a decentralised institute that takes care of the different parts of the system (the state system and the former federal services).

It appears that resources are therefore not used efficiently, for instance regarding school funding or teacher professional development. Local governments have uneven roles throughout the country and schools still have very little autonomy. The system continues to be very much teacher-centred (as opposed to student/learning-centred). This is partially, but not exclusively, due to the active role of the main education trade union (*Sindicato Nacional para los Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE*) at every level of the system, and in almost every policy issue, not just those related to labour.

The General Law of Education, approved in 1993, regulates the education provided by the state (federal government, the states and local governments), as well as decentralised entities and private education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993). It strengthened the role of the federal government as the main decision-maker of the national education system; in exchange, the states became responsible for operating the education services.

Further progress was made with the Sectorial Education Programme 2007-2012 (*Programa Sectorial de Educación 2007-2012*), the main educational route map of the current government. This national programme defined the need to introduce large-scale education reform targeting a set of basic objectives, including the need to raise the quality and equity of education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007). Its main objectives are:

1. Improving the quality of education;
2. Providing greater equity in education opportunities;
3. Achieving a didactic use of information and communication technologies;
4. Performing public policy according to the Third Article of the Mexican Constitution;
5. Providing relevant and pertinent education that fosters sustainable development, productivity and employment;
6. Aiming for a full democratisation of the education system.

In parallel, the Alliance for Quality in Education (*Alianza por la Calidad de la Educación*), a national pact on education, was signed in 2008 by the Presidency¹ and the SNTE, and later supported by most of the governments of the states. The *Alianza* has been an important political agreement that also drew from the guidelines established in the Sectorial Education Programme 2007-2012. The *Alianza* has helped to shape education policy since its creation. It focuses on five areas that aim to foster change in the education system:

1. Modernisation of schools;
2. Professionalisation of teachers and education authorities;
3. Students' well-being and personal development;
4. Students' preparation for life and work;
5. Evaluation to improve the quality of education.

The *Alianza* defined relevant goals and has made important progress in the right direction (such as implementing the National Teacher Examination), but still presents important challenges. Many are not well known and have not been subject to sufficient consultation. Some groups of educational researchers have openly opposed several of the outputs of the *Alianza* and some states have not supported it. Teachers in classrooms seem far from the political decisions taking place. For some, it seems as if the *Alianza* is associated with political strategies rather than educational ones.

Table 2.2

Some of the key school programmes in Mexico

| |
|---|
| Scientific Research and Technological Development (<i>Investigación Científica y Desarrollo Tecnológico</i>) |
| Design and Application of Gender Equity Policies (<i>Diseño y Aplicación de Políticas de Equidad de Género</i>) |
| Schools of Quality (<i>Escuelas de Calidad</i>) |
| Support Scholarships for the Basic Education of Young Mothers and Pregnant Youngsters (<i>Becas de apoyo a la Educación Básica de Madres Jóvenes y Jóvenes Embarazadas</i>) |
| Basic Education for Boys and Girls of Internal Migrant Agricultural Families (<i>Educación Básica para Niños y Niñas de Familias Jornaleras Agrícolas Migrantes</i>) |
| Full-time Schools (<i>Escuelas de Tiempo Completo</i>) |
| Safe School (<i>Escuela Segura</i>) |
| “Always Open to Community” School (<i>Escuela Siempre Abierta a la Comunidad</i>) |
| Education Support to Groups in Vulnerable Situations (<i>Atención Educativa a Grupos en Situación vulnerable</i>) |
| <i>Enciclomedia</i> |
| Promotion and Encouragement of Books and Reading (<i>Promoción y Fomento de Libros y la Lectura</i>) |
| National Reading Programme (<i>Programa Nacional de Lectura</i>) |
| Strengthening of <i>Telesecundaria</i> services (<i>Fortalecimiento del Servicio de la Educación Telesecundaria</i>) |
| Digital Abilities for All (<i>Habilidades Digitales para Todos</i>) |
| Strengthening of Special Education and Education Integration (<i>Fortalecimiento de la Educación Especial y de la Integración Educativa</i>) |
| Strengthening of Early Education and Child Development (<i>Fortalecimiento a la Educación Temprana y el Desarrollo Infantil</i>) |
| Technical Pedagogical Advisor (<i>Asesor Técnico Pedagógico</i>) |
| Strengthening of Actions Related to Indigenous Education (<i>Fortalecimiento a las acciones asociadas a la educación indígena</i>) |
| Emergent Programme for the Improvement of Educational Achievement (<i>Programa Emergente para la Mejora del Logro Educativo</i>), developed with the <i>Alianza</i> . |

In addition to these larger policy frameworks or strategies, there has been much investment in education in recent years. This has included increased spending on school infrastructure, with a programme set up for this purpose (*Programa de Fortalecimiento de la Infraestructura Educativa*). At the national level, the Ministry of Education has introduced the National Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Schools (*Evaluación Nacional de Logro Académico en Centros Escolares*, ENLACE), a diagnostic test to measure student results at different grade levels and subjects, and these results are made available to schools and parents.

The Ministry has developed a variety of programmes to address educational needs in schools. In fact, there are many programmes that guide education in Mexico, at the federal and state levels, as this is one of the main ways in which the education system operates. Table 2.2 provides an overview of some of these programmes. Many of the programmes were originally developed for specific population groups and have become consolidated permanent structures. More recently, new programmes that aim to improve quality in the education service have been strengthened. Among these, the Schools of Quality Programme (*Programa Escuelas de Calidad*) is one of the relevant ones (Box 2.2 introduces its main components). More recently, the Ministry has introduced a strategy to improve educational achievement in low performing schools, based on ENLACE results, called the Emerging Programme of Education Achievement (*Programa Emergente para la Mejora del Logro Educativo*).

A major accomplishment has been the National Teacher Examination, introduced in 2008 by the *Alianza* to assess the suitability of teacher candidates and in-service teachers to teach. This process of teacher licensing contributes to the selection of a higher quality teacher workforce and makes the process of teacher allocation to posts and to schools more transparent (further information and recommendations related to this can be found in Chapter 3). The national Congress has also been considering major education and labour reforms that can have positive impact. In particular, in spring 2010 they passed an initiative to establish a national teacher census (*Padrón Nacional de Maestros*) to clarify the number of teachers, something urgently needed in Mexico.

In addition, decentralisation has brought about a larger role for state education policy making. Many states have introduced innovative changes and there are rich experiences across the country in different areas, such as teacher professional development, supervision, schools networks and peer-to-peer tutoring initiatives. Many organisations from civil society, universities and research centres have also contributed to these initiatives and some build bridges between state, federal or even international initiatives.

A LARGE SYSTEM WITH POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVEMENT

This section gives a global overview of the dimensions, operation and results of the Mexican basic education system and emphasises some of its main challenges. It explains why the OECD's recommendations focus on teacher professionalisation and school management and leadership.

A large and varied school system

In the 2007/08 school year, around 25 million students were enrolled in basic education and around 90% were enrolled in public schools. Four million were enrolled in upper secondary and three million in higher education. Teachers and school directors account for about 1.7 million education workers (among these 1.1 million are in basic education) organised in 32 jurisdictions (31 states and one federal district) (*Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación*, INEE, 2009) (see Table 2.3).

The education services are organised into three main levels: a) basic education includes pre-school education (three years; 3 to 5 year-olds); primary education (six years; 6 to 11 year-olds) and lower secondary education (three years; 12 to 14-15 year-olds), as well as initial, special and adult education (for those who are illiterate); b) upper secondary; c) and higher education, which includes initial education for basic education teachers. School attendance is mandatory until the completion of lower secondary education, at age 14-15.

In 2002 it was decided that pre-schooling would be compulsory for 3 to 5 year-old children, and from 2004/05 to 2008/09 this measure was gradually implemented. Compulsory pre-schooling has raised some concerns. Pre-school is a powerful tool to address learning inequities that result from children's social background, but the legal obligation to provide three years of compulsory pre-school education may divert scarce resources from secondary education, where the number of students is rising rapidly and attainment standards are unsatisfactory.

Mexican students can improve their performance

Despite today's almost universal enrolment rate of children aged 5 to 14, too few students continue to upper secondary education, and the quality of education is too low in many parts of the system (see Figure 1.3 in Chapter 1, Figures 2.1 and 2.2 and (OECD, 2009b)). In Mexico, almost 3.6 million of 15 to 19 year-olds (66.4% of the total population of this age group) are not in education, which is by far the highest figure among OECD and partner countries. From this group, more than 2.3 million of them (43.2%) are employed, 1.1 million (20.4%) are not in the labour force and 150 000 (2.8%) are unemployed (OECD, 2009b). Labour market access and high employment seem to be a key reason why young people do not stay in school, linked to the

Table 2.3

Size and structure of the Mexican education system, 2000-2008

| Education modalities | | Students | | Teachers | | Schools | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | | Total 2008/2009 | 2000-2008 Change | Total 2008/2009 | 2000-2008 Change | Total 2008/2009 | 2000-2008 Change |
| Basic education (3-14) | Pre-school | 4 634 412 | 35.4 | 218 206 | 39.6 | 89 395 | 24.4 |
| | Primary | 14 815 735 | 0.2 | 568 752 | 3.7 | 98 575 | -0.4 |
| | Secondary | 6 153 459 | 15.0 | 369 548 | 19.5 | 34 380 | 21.3 |
| | Subtotal | 25 603 606 | 8.6 | 1 156 506 | 14.1 | 222 350 | 11.6 |
| Upper secondary education (15-17) | General <i>Bachillerato</i> | 2 378 655 | 34.9 | 173 952 | 39.6 | 10 100 | 61.7 |
| | Technological <i>Bachillerato</i> | 1 178 203 | 41.7 | 69 903 | 31.3 | 2 577 | 37.1 |
| | Professional-Technical | 366 964 | 1.5 | 28 962 | -10.1 | 1 426 | -12.7 |
| | Subtotal | 3 923 822 | 32.8 | 272 817 | 29.9 | 14 103 | 44.5 |
| Higher education (18-24) | Normal | 131 763 | -34.4 | 15 462 | -11.0 | 487 | -25.6 |
| | University and Technological degrees | 2 387 911 | 39.0 | 238 911 | 36.8 | 3 420 | 48.7 |
| | Postgraduate | 185 516 | 43.9 | 36 895 | 121.9 | 1 653 | 51.1 |
| | Subtotal | 2 705 190 | 32.1 | 291 268 | 39.6 | 5 560 | 37.3 |
| Total | 32 232 618 | 12.8 | 1 720 591 | 20.1 | 242 013 | 13.6 | |

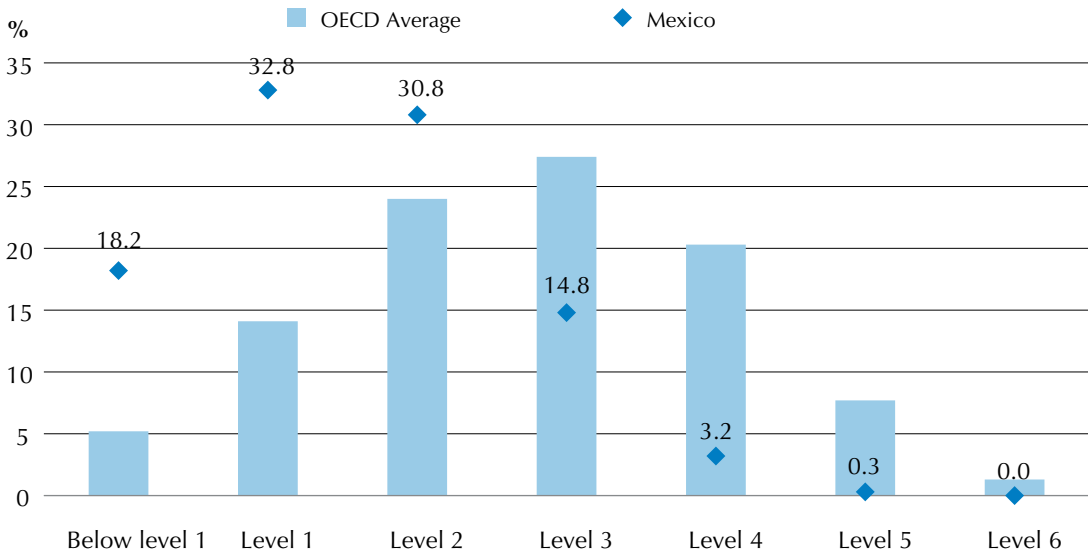
Source: Zorrilla and Barba (2008), *La federalización educativa: una valoración externa desde la experiencia de los estados*, SEP, Mexico.VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, y XII Censos de Población y Vivienda (1950; 1960; 1970; 1980; 1990; 2000), tabulados básicos, Proyecciones de la población de México 2005-2050, Conapo. Data provided by INEE.

need to support their families and themselves. If young people are not at school or formally working, it is very likely that at least a significant percentage of them are working in the informal sector (non-regulated commerce, for example).

In terms of achievement, results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that far too many students do not have a high level of skills and knowledge in Mexico in comparison with other OECD countries (Figure 2.1). In Mexico, one in two 15-year-olds did not reach the baseline level 2 in PISA, while the OECD average was 19.2% in 2006. Only 3% of Mexican students achieved the top levels 5 and 6, which require students to demonstrate that they can consistently identify, explain and apply scientific knowledge in a variety of complex life situations. In comparison, 9% of 15-year-olds reach levels 5 and 6 across other OECD countries (OECD, 2007a; Hopkins *et al.*, 2008).

The performance of Mexican students can be improved. In spite of the multiple challenges and numerous existing strategies to respond to these, Mexico needs to focus its efforts on this goal: that all children and young people achieve their full learning potential. To achieve this in the complex Mexican education system, the OECD Steering Group recommends establishing a small number of clear, highest priority and measurable aims focused on improving the learning of all students and align all efforts towards their achievement. These specific aims are to improve student attainment, reduce drop-out, ensure timely graduation (*egreso oportuno*) and reduce inequalities across the education system.

Figure 2.1

Performance of 15-year-old students in Mexico compared with the OECD average, PISA 2006 (science)

Source: OECD (2007), *PISA 2006 Science Competencies for Tomorrow's World, Volume 2*, OECD, Paris, Table 2.1a.

Schools and teaching need to take centre stage

The education system has around 220 000 schools in basic education with 194 121 **public schools** catering to 23.1 million students and 26 200 **private schools** with 2.3 million students. Box 2.1 describes the types and structure of Mexico's schools.

In basic education, children attend school either in the morning or in the afternoon, except in those schools that have introduced full time education or some private schools. On average, the regular school day is from 9:00 to 12:00 in pre-school, 8:00 to 12:30 in primary school, 7:00 to 13:30 in lower secondary school, and 8:00 to 14:00 in *Telesecundarias*. In the afternoon, primary schools have about four and a half hours of instruction, which can be between 14:00 and 18:30. This implies that many school buildings are used twice for different groups of students and teachers and that one school building may have two different directors: one for the morning and another for the afternoon. In addition, there is some evidence that the quality of the schools varies much between the morning and the afternoon shifts.

In addition to the fact that in most schools the Mexican school day is limited to either morning or afternoon, it seems that not enough is done to make the best use of time available. In Mexico, intended hours of instruction are compulsory. The 800 hours per year (200 days in 41 weeks = 4 hours average per day) of intended instruction time for primary-age pupils is just above the OECD annual average for 7 to 8 year-olds (759 hours) and just below the OECD average for 9 to 11 year-olds (802 hours). In lower secondary education, at 1 167 hours (200 days in 41 weeks = 5.8 hours average per day), Mexico's intended hours of instruction are high compared to OECD average (918 hours), and at 1 058 hours (in 173 days in 36 weeks = 6.1 hours average per day),² it has the fourth longest intended instruction time for 15-year-olds (OECD, 2010b). But these intentions are not

Box 2.1 A portrait of Mexico's schools

Regular schools (*Escuela General*) at the pre-school and primary levels are complemented by special community schools that take care of students in marginalised, dispersed and small areas (*Escuela Comunitaria*) or those with important indigenous populations (*Escuela Indígena*). However, many schools may have only one or a few teachers to teach two or more levels – as is the case in 44% schools for primary education – or do not teach all levels of education.

Lower secondary level is also divided in *General* and *Comunitarias* schools. These are complemented with schools that provide lower secondary learning via television in remote areas (*Telesecundarias*), and technical lower secondary education (*Secundaria Técnica*).

| "Basic education" schools | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Education level | Type of school |
| Pre-school (18%) | General (16%) |
| | Community (1%) |
| | Indigenous (1%) |
| Primary (58%) | General (54%) |
| | Community (1%) |
| | Indigenous (3%) |
| Lower secondary (24%) | General (12%) |
| | Telesecundaria (5%) |
| | Technical (7%) |
| | Community (0%) |

The size of these schools varies widely depending on whether they are found in urban or rural areas and the type of population they are catering to. In primary education, the average class size is 20 students in public schools and 21 students in private schools. In secondary education, the average class size is about 30 students in public schools and 25 in private schools.

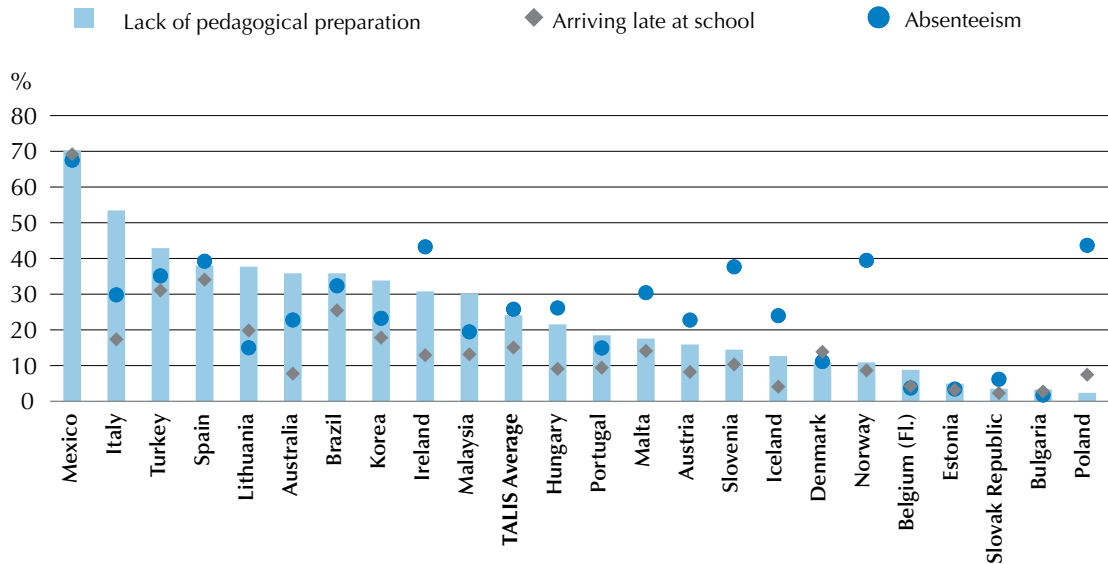
Source: Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación (INEE) (2009), *Panorama Educativo de México. Indicadores del Sistema Educativo Mexicano*, INEE, Mexico and Santizo Rodall, C. (2009), *Mejorar el Liderazgo Escolar: Reporte del Contexto Mexicano, Analytical Paper*; www.oecd.org/edu/calidadeducativa, OECD, Paris.

necessarily realised in practice; for example, in Mexico, an "hour" of secondary education is not calculated as a period of 60 minutes. Each federal state defines the time of its "pedagogic hour", and these can range from 40 to 50 minutes each.

This is compounded by extensive absenteeism and late arrival of teachers, with the result that pupils do not have the amount of taught time they are entitled to with their regular teachers. This is a significant management challenge at all levels of the system. At the primary level, the net teaching load in Mexico – 800 statutory hours per year – is slightly above the OECD average of 786 hours. By contrast, a lower secondary teacher in Mexico is required to teach 1 047 hours per year, the highest number of statutory teaching hours among OECD countries except the United States (OECD average = 703 hours). However, while these long working hours are statutory, the reality does not match this. Figure 2.2 below shows that Mexico has to deal with issues concerning teacher quality,

Figure 2.2

Behaviours that directors report hinder schools' instruction across countries, 2007-2008



Source: OECD (2009), *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First Results from TALIS*, OECD, Paris.

absenteeism or late arrival at school, and that these issues may be hindering the effectiveness of the long working hours per year in Mexico.

The teacher workforce operates in a culture of sparse resources. Many teach in one school in the mornings and another in the afternoons, or in a different type of employment, or in small schools where there are few opportunities for teamwork and learning from each other. This raises concerns about the training, selection and allocation of teachers to schools; the professional careers of teachers; and the quality of support to schools and teachers from school directors, supervisors and others who lead and manage the system.

Additionally, the system lacks clearly defined standards to guide virtually every aspect of its work, beginning with what students should know and be able to do in each subject at each grade level. Mexico also lacks clear standards of professional practice that define good teaching, standards that directors should be expected to meet, and clear school standards. However, as explained further in this chapter, and in Chapters 3 and 4, there are currently some initiatives to develop standards in all these areas.

A new assessment tool, the National Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Schools (*Evaluación Nacional de Logro Académico en Centros Escolares*, ENLACE) was introduced in 2005 to measure student performance across the country. In basic education, this test is applied to students from primary and lower secondary in the following areas alternately each year: mathematics, Spanish and civics and ethics. In upper secondary, all students take the ENLACE test in their last year of studies in order to evaluate the language and mathematic skills they acquired during their school career. ENLACE's results are public and have become an important tool to give feedback to schools, families, students, teachers and authorities that can contribute to measuring progress and ensuring that support is provided to the schools that need it most.

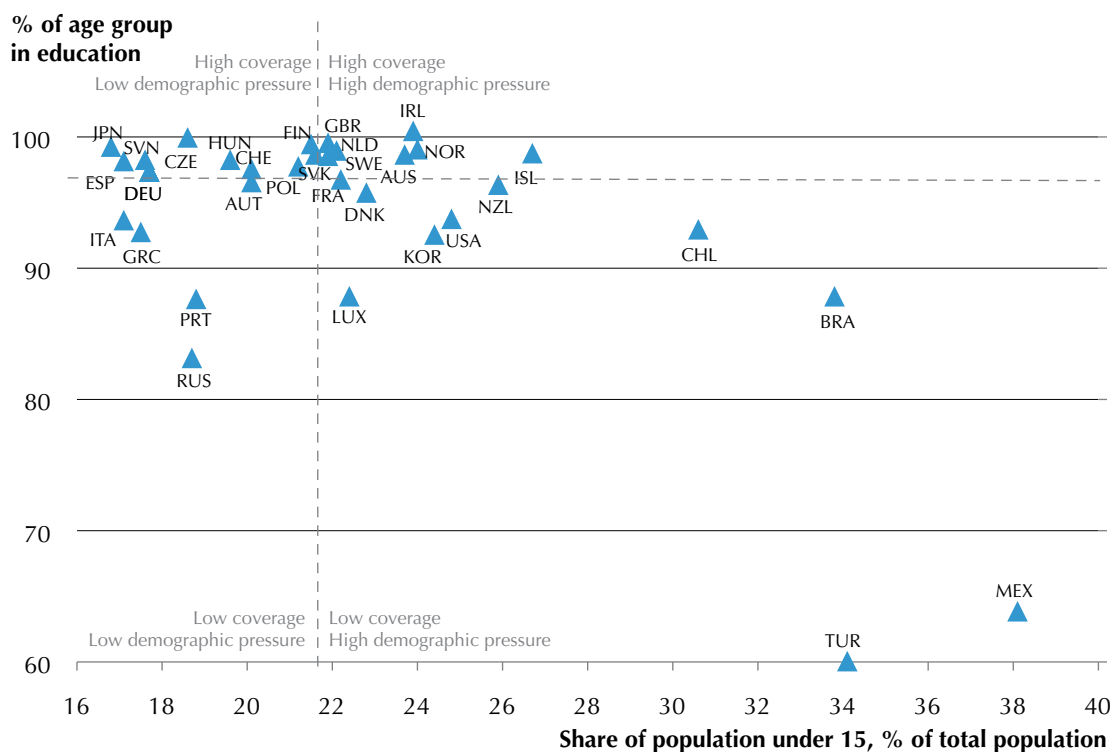
Schools in Mexico have much to gain by focusing more strongly on students and their improvement. This can be achieved by investing in quality leadership teaching and by providing the right framework for teachers to be more effective. Recent efforts have centred on this need, but more needs to be done to place schools at the centre.

Continued investment can be distributed more effectively

Mexico has consistently increased educational investment, not just in absolute terms but also in terms of a rising share of GDP being devoted to education. In fact, at 21.7% the share of public spending invested in education³ is the highest among OECD countries (13.3% is the OECD average). Indeed, based on these measures, Mexico's economic commitment to education appears higher than that of most other OECD countries, but the size of its young population means the amount spent per student is lower. Expenditure per student remains low by international standards: spending per primary student in Mexico, at 2 111 USD (adjusted for differences in purchasing power parities), is still very low and is approximately one third of the OECD average (6 741 USD). Spending per student in lower secondary education (1 814 USD) is approximately one quarter of the OECD average of 7 598 USD. Although this partly reflects Mexico's age structure, which is younger than in most OECD countries (Figure 2.3), there is an urgent need to analyse how to optimise expenditure to increase the efficiency of investment in education (OECD, 2010b).

Figure 2.3

Demographic pressure compared to education coverage, 2006



Source: OECD (2009), *OECD Economic Surveys: Mexico*, OECD, Paris.

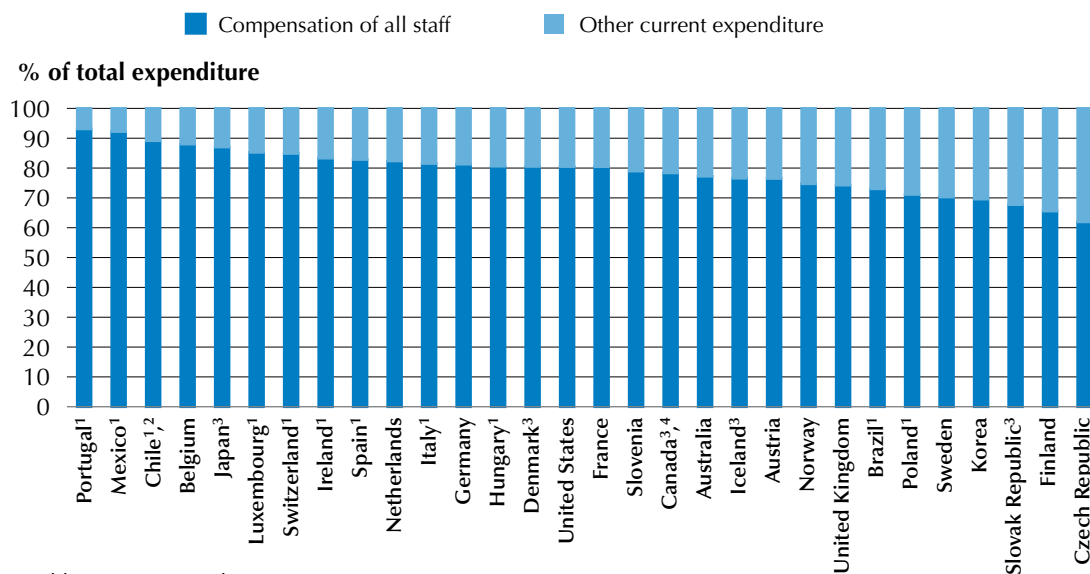
It seems that there are weaknesses in the distribution of resources and the productive use of these resources. Compensation for staff absorbs a very high proportion (92.2%) of education spending at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary levels compared with other OECD countries while other current expenditure, such as on teaching materials, accounts for a very small share of total spending (7.8%) (Figure 2.4). Also, total current expenditure accounts for 97.5% of Mexico's total expenditure and capital expenditure accounts for only 2.5%. This is the second highest share of current expenditure – after Portugal – among OECD countries (OECD, 2010b). The reliance on parental donations means that schools serving more prosperous communities receive more money, while schools that provide for children from poor families receive less. This has resulted in endemic inequity being embedded in the system.

Also, there is an uneven distribution of inputs to schools, with schools in low income areas having poor public infrastructure and less qualified teachers. Current allocation of resources leaves little room for improvements in the schooling infrastructure. In fact, Mexico devotes a much smaller share of total spending to the schooling infrastructure and to educational materials than other countries, even if this expenditure is important for Mexico.

At the primary level, only 1.9% of spending is devoted to capital spending, compared with an OECD average of 7.8%. At the secondary level it is 3.2% compared with an OECD average of 7.4% and at the tertiary level it is 4.8% compared with an OECD average of 9.3% (OECD, 2010b).

Figure 2.4

Distribution of current expenditure on educational institutions for primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education, 2007



1. Public institutions only.

2. Year of reference 2008.

3. Some levels of education are included with others.

4. Year of reference 2006.

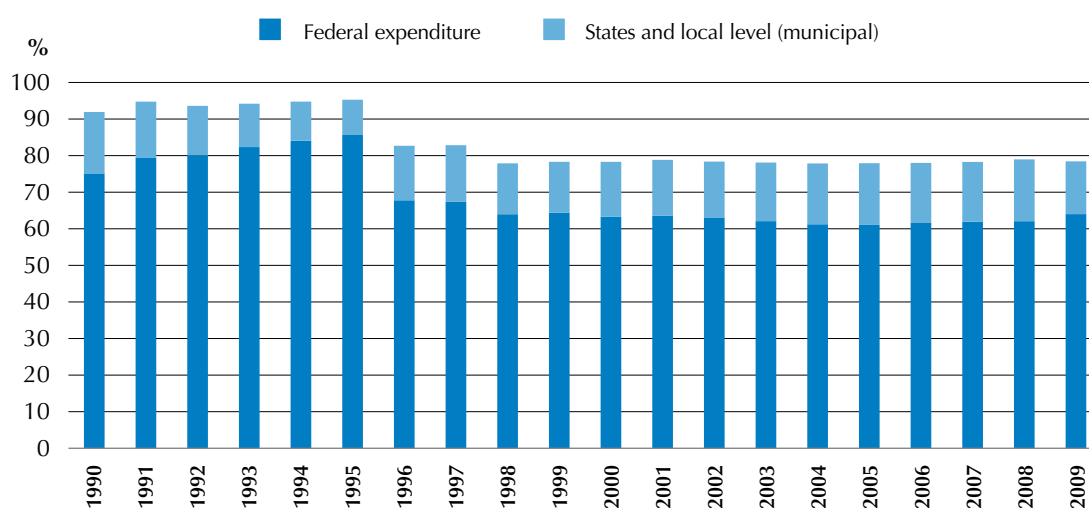
Note: Countries are ranked in descending order of the share of compensation of all staff in primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education. The chart shows the distribution of current spending on educational institutions by resource category. Spending on educational institutions can be broken down into capital and current expenditure. Within current expenditure, one can distinguish between spending on instruction compared to ancillary and research and development services.

Source: OECD (2010b), *Education at a Glance 2010: OECD Indicators*, OECD, Paris.

In 1993, the General Law of Education established that, with the decentralisation of the educational services to the states, national educational resources would be transferred to the states and financing would be done concurrently. The central government would also provide specific resources for the most disadvantaged states (Articles 25 and 34) (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993). There remain many challenges in this regard. Full devolution and support did not materialise, and there remains a centralist tradition. As Figure 2.5 shows, with the decentralisation of the educational services, the reduction of federal public spending was not compensated for by an increase in state spending. The revision of the formula of resource allocation to states,⁴ which appears to have created great inequities in the amount of resources that states receive for education, seems to be pending.

Figure 2.5

Mexican education expenditure by level of government, 1990-2009



Note: The figures show only public spending on education. The difference between these and total expenditure (100%) is accounted for by private spending on education. Years 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009 are based upon preliminary data.

Source: Data provided by the *Secretaría de Educación Pública (Dirección General de Planeación y Programación)*.

As mentioned previously, a significant part of education services and funding is provided through programmes. These programmes are structured interventions, with specific goals and activities, and to which a budget is usually attached (Table 2.2). They can be federal or state programmes, and in any given year there could be several running at the same time in a particular state (the Steering Group was informed that at any given point it could be around 200 programmes). Box 2.2 presents examples of some of the programmes focused on school improvement. The programmes have not solved the problem of financial inequity, since only about 50% of schools actually have access to them. Many schools in the poorest or isolated regions are unable to access these programmes and their human, capital and financial resources.

Despite its economic efforts, Mexican schools operate with sparse resources that need to be distributed among a young population. As shown previously, Mexico faces structural challenges, such as the need to increase the number of schools that offer long school days and to provide adequate learning environments for all students. There are also challenges related to everyday processes (such as those shown in Figure 2.2), which indicate that school directors in Mexico view teachers' lateness, absenteeism and lack of pedagogical preparation as

Box 2.2 Selected school improvement programmes in Mexico

The **Schools of Quality Programme** (*Programa Escuelas de Calidad, PEC*) is intended to reduce the gap in quality between schools through allocating grants to finance school improvement plans. It aims to give autonomy to schools and encourage shared decision-making among directors, teachers and parents through Social Participation Councils. The project started in 2001 and in 2008/09 it covered about 40 790 schools, 296 478 teachers and 34 688 school directors. Between 2006 and 2009, it obtained financing from the World Bank, which has been renewed for 2010-13.

To participate in the programme, staff and parents prepare a plan which outlines steps for improving the school. The school receives an annual grant that can be provided for a maximum of five years if the school is elected each time to implement the activities included in the plan. During the first four years, PEC requires schools to spend 70% of the grant on supplies, infrastructure and other physical goods. In the final year, schools must only spend 50% of the grant on such goods, and much of the grant should be directed to fund teacher training and development. Parent associations are involved in designing school improvement plans, purchasing supplies and carrying out the plans. School directors also receive training through PEC, as there are no formal training requirements for directors.

This programme could provide five-year grants of up to 15 000 USD through federal, state and social participation resources to about 21% of Mexican basic education schools. The resources allocated to schools have decreased, since the total amount of resources has remained stable and the number of participating schools has increased. Despite the fact that every Mexican primary school can participate and that PEC targets mainly disadvantaged schools, some experts have underlined the risk of fostering the gap between “poor” mainly rural schools and urban schools with more resources.

The **Full-Time Schools Programme** (*Programa Escuelas de Tiempo Completo, PETC*) is mainly focused on populations living in urban-marginalised contexts, or with large proportions of indigenous, migrants, or students with low educational achievement. This programme proposes the gradual increase of the school day to 1 200 hours per year, based on a six-element pedagogic proposal: 1) fostering learning of curricular contents; 2) didactic use of ICT; 3) learning additional languages; 4) art and culture; 5) recreation and physical development; and 6) healthy life. Created in 2007, this programme had 500 basic education schools participating across the country. During 2009/10, it reached 365 269 students, 2 000 school directors and 13 271 teachers for 2,214 schools in 30 federal entities.

Among the programme’s main achievements are: 1) the improvement in students’ results in schools that have participated in three consecutive years of the programme (about 40 points in Spanish and mathematics on the ENLACE test at the national level); 2) better learning environments, which provide children with a “safe environment, stimuli for learning and competence development”; and 3) greater synergies with other programmes and different administration levels (federal, state and local-level governments).

The **Emergent Programme for Improvement in Education Achievement** (*Programa Emergente para la Mejora del Logro Educativo, PEMLE*) is focused in providing support for around 7 395 schools that had the lowest achievement levels in the ENLACE tests of 2007, 2008 and 2009. Launched on a three-year plan (November 2009 to December 2012), this programme is composed of two key elements: a) training networks of teachers, and b) personalised capacity-building at schools and for school staff through tutorships.

In addition to improving education results, the objectives of the programme are to: 1) encourage an understanding of topics beyond the lessons taught or the mere teaching of content; 2) help teachers have a better knowledge of the main basic education topics beyond levels or grades; 3) develop tutoring networks of continuous training; and 4) foster a better pedagogic exchange between teachers and their students, both inside and across regions, in order to build local capacities.

The training strategy has six main elements: a) personalised tutoring; b) working groups aiming to professionalise their education practices; c) the creation of networks of these groups; c) providing participants with educative materials to facilitate a better understanding of the subjects that are most difficult for students; d) working with parents; e) providing specific thematic support catalogues; f) implementing additional social and educative development initiatives to fight against unfavourable situations that hinder educational achievement. These elements are organised in a strategy known as “Complete Modules of Specific Academic Strengthening” (*Módulos Integrales de Fortalecimiento Académico Específico* – MIFAE).

Sources: Skoufias and Shapiro (2006) *Evaluating the Impact of Mexico's Quality Schools Program: The Pitfalls of Using Non Experimental Data*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 4036, The World Bank, Washington, DC. basica.sep.gob.mx/pec; basica.sep.gob.mx/tiempocompleto/start.php?act=oportunidades; basica.sep.gob.mx/dgdgie/cva/sitio/start.php?act=notapp111.

important factors hindering education reform in Mexico. Thus, it appears that Mexico's greatest challenge has to do not only with increasing or optimising the redistribution of resources, but also ensuring that these are used efficiently.

Engaging a wide range of stakeholders

The complexity of interaction between different stakeholders in the Mexican education system has grown over the last 30 years. This has been due to the process of growing pluralism within the country as well as to the process of decentralisation. While the federal government still has the greatest share of responsibility for setting the direction of education policy in Mexico, a variety of actors have become increasingly involved.

The *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP or Ministry of Public Education) is responsible for the formulation of the main education policies of the country. With the 1992 agreement (*Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica y Normal*), the SEP kept its responsibility for setting the national character of education, including basic education and the initial training and continuing education of basic education teachers. It has the following powers: a) to decide on national syllabi and curricula, set the national school calendar, prepare free text books and regulate private institutions; and b) to regulate a national system of teacher training and professional development, plan and programme different measures in the educational system, determine the general limits of evaluation and make evaluations that are coordinated with the states.

At present, each state is responsible for administering the education system in its territory and for nominating the team responsible, except in the Federal District, which was not decentralised in 1992 and is still part of the Federal SEP, run by an administrator named by the national Minister of Education. The states hold key administrating responsibilities, including the provision of some teacher training (Article 13) (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993).

To ensure a greater scope in national decision-making by state authorities, governors and ministers have engaged in two forums in recent years: the National Governors' Conference (CONAGO) and the National Council of Education Authorities (CONAEDU). These ensure that federal and local education policy makers meet periodically to analyse

and exchange opinions about the development of the national education system and to formulate recommendations and actions to strengthen education (Article 17 of the General Law of Education). CONAEDU was constituted in 2004 for state ministers and the federal authority to discuss issues of common interest and to take collegial decisions and actions. At present, CONAEDU has more of an advisory role when called for by the federation and its influence does not seem to be on aspects of policy design, but rather limited to implementation aspects.

The 1992 agreement also extended the scope of the local authorities' jurisdiction and at the present time the building, renovating and equipping of school spaces are also operated in a decentralised manner. Their involvement in education programmes and in school councils is also a confirmation of the way their role is expected to increase. However, until now, local authorities have had uneven roles: in some regions, such as rural and isolated areas, local school authorities may have a relevant role, while in other areas, such as urban regions, their role has been weaker.

An important player in education is the National Union of Education Workers or SNTE (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación*),⁵ to which between 1.3 and 1.5 million education workers are affiliated. This figure includes: basic school teachers, school leaders, supervisors (inspectors), heads of zones and departments and administrative and technical personnel at all levels. It also includes many staff from initial teacher preparation institutions (for example *Normales*), those in charge of continuous education, and personnel working at the state ministries and SEP. Workers in the public sector who have a permanent, interim or transitory contract may also be union members, as well as pensioners or retired persons who have worked in education and who contribute economically to supporting the organisation. For its support, the SNTE deducts for its discretionary use 1% of the wage of the workers belonging to it (Santibáñez, 2002).

Representatives of civil society are slowly occupying an important space in Mexico, raising awareness of the need to strengthen public education and providing important bridges between parents, society, education and schools. In addition to parents' associations, in recent years new and active civil society organisations and networks have emerged at the state and national levels. Their demands seem to be gaining attention from education authorities and other stakeholders. Among these, the OECD Steering Group has seen and received contributions from an active set of organisations such as *Mexicanos Primero* and *Suma por la Educación*, *Observatorio Ciudadano* and *Empresarios por la Educación Básica*. Yet there do not seem to be formal channels for representing their views on education policy matters. The National Council for Social Participation (CONAPASE) was created to reflect the interests of these special interest groups and representatives of different institutions, but there has not been much progress in its formal development in the past decade.

At the school level there is a key group of stakeholders that play a role in education, including supervisors, school directors and school councils. School directors in Mexico are considered the maximal education authority in the school by Mexican regulations. Their main task is to define the goals, strategies and policies for school operation, which includes pedagogic guidance for teachers and other school staff, and also administrative tasks. The role of supervisors is to enforce with the director the link between the school and the education system. Technical pedagogical advisors (*Asesores Técnico-Pedagógicos*, ATP) do not have a clearly defined task as their post does not officially exist within the legal structure, but they have a transversal presence across the different levels of the system, providing support in different types of tasks. Further analysis of these key stakeholders is undertaken in Chapter 4, which reviews the governance and management structure of schools in Mexico.

All of these groups and institutions play a key role in the education system and also in policy development. Many are engaged in policy processes, but there are no institutionalised ways of ensuring capacity across the system or formal channels of communication for consensus-building in a process of decentralisation that has not been fully achieved. Often, there is not enough coordination or consultation among them and this may

lead to inefficiencies. Many actors have different levels of responsibility, and capacity to define and act upon reforms. Yet there do not appear to be institutional frameworks that promote clear and permanent engagement of different groups. The results obtained by bringing together different key Mexican education policy actors in the OECD-Harvard Seminar for Leaders in Education Reform, held in Chile, Ontario and Mexico in 2010, revealed the value of discussion and consensus-building for them. In particular, participants valued the process of bringing together many of the key actors described above to engage in discussions about what their priorities are and how to move forward (Box 2.3).

Box 2.3 Enhancing capacity for reform: the OECD-Harvard Seminar for Leaders in Education Reform

As part of the OECD-Mexico Agreement to Improve the Quality of Schools in Mexico, the OECD-Harvard Seminar for Leaders in Education Reform was designed for training and capacity building and to explore the topics of school management; and teacher professionalisation in relevant and good practice countries.

This modular seminar for high-level policy makers has combined country study visits to Chile and Ontario (Canada) with an active training programme to enhance reform capacity in Mexico, using the OECD recommendations presented in this report to underpin the seminar. Through study visits to Chile and Ontario, participants in the seminar improve their skills in reform by:

- Developing a comparative perspective on school leadership and on teacher professionalisation issues;
- Visiting, exchanging with local actors at different levels of a different educational system, and analysing best practices in designing and implementing policies in school management and teacher professionalisation;
- Working together to develop an implementable plan of action for their own context.

The study visit is an active training programme for policy makers. Its key objective is to develop the skills of participants promoting and engaging in reforms based on evidence. It does so by engaging participants in the study of qualitative and quantitative knowledge and analysing practical experiences that present different options for education policy reform. This methodology has demonstrated value where reforms are needed and there are divergent interests and actors.

Participants developed a strategy suitable to their own context based on the knowledge acquired throughout the seminar. This seminar is an active learning process based on a double interaction: on the one hand between theory and practice; on the other hand between the different actors engaged in specific reforms. Throughout the seminar, participants actively engage in the following:

- Joint decisions on the concrete elements that will be analysed;
- Site visit observation of all the elements that have been agreed;
- The preparation of reports of results for exchange among all participants;
- Active discussions on the possible application of what has been learned to the own context;
- The preparation of a written report with the conclusions agreed by the whole group.

Source: www.oecd.org/edu/calidadeducativa

CONDITIONS AND PRINCIPLES FOR REFORM IN MEXICO

As this chapter has shown, Mexico's education system needs to implement structural reforms, given the need to strengthen the quality and equity of education in a complex environment. This section discusses the key conditions for successful education reforms presented in Chapter 1 in the context of the current situation in Mexico reviewed in the previous sections.

Perhaps the first element in establishing a path for improvement is the need to **make education a key national priority**. A former Mexican Education Minister once explained that there is a tension in the Mexican education system between what is urgent and what is important. While he recognised that the "important" could not be solved without attending to the "urgent", he considered that the urgent (issues that are generally of a political nature, such as strikes, political agendas or conflicts of interest within states) did not leave enough time for those issues that are really important, such as application of studied and well matured political decisions. The usual order of priorities for an education minister in Mexico is: 1) political aspects; 2) communication matters; 3) administration and management; 4) management of resources; and finally, 5) education issues (Latapí, 2007). Therefore, the definition of a policy strategy that is educational *per se* should be seen as the core business by policy makers and other stakeholders, with the learning and well-being of all students as its maximum goal.

In terms of establishing clear goals, over the last few years, Mexico has increasingly emphasised the importance of ensuring that children go to and learn at schools, for example by providing almost universal enrolment of students aged 5 to 14, or by implementing measures to analyse the progress of students' learning (for example ENLACE) or by developing full time education for some schools (Box 2.2). The Mexican Constitution (Third Article) that determines the right of all Mexicans to receive education defines many of the core educational goals. The Educational Sector Plan (2007-2012) establishes specific educational goals for this government, and the *Alianza* (Alliance for Quality in Education), signed between the Presidency and the SNTE, also establishes objectives and priorities. The governments of each state also set their priorities and allocate budgets. The Senate and Congress legislate according to these plans and what they consider are the main priorities and allocate available resources.

Yet there are different strategies, priorities and programmes, and the key basic objectives are not clearly permeated through the system. As Chapter 1 suggested, the OECD Steering Group considers it important to **establish a small number of clear, highest priority and measurable goals focused on student learning**, focusing on equity as well as quality, with a commitment to ensuring that all groups of students make steady progress. Taking account of these priorities, actors need to fully understand the rationale for specific reforms and plans. Why are these initiatives being promoted? What can be achieved through them? Why is it important for all actors to support them through time? Knowing this will help actors establish basic points of consensus that will be sustained over time.

As goals are important but insufficient, systems must **develop an overall strategy that deals with all the relevant components over time**. Any strategy starts with *setting objectives*, and how these are defined is essential. The *design* of the strategy is the key intermediate stage between the setting and *implementation* of objectives. Indeed, Mexico can draw many lessons from its own past strategies.

In setting up objectives or goals, it is important to **engage in discussion with all stakeholders**, in particular state authorities, and **ensure that the key objectives allow for coverage of the specific needs of national and regional jurisdictions**. States need to be given the opportunity and capacity to assess their own particular situation with regard to their accomplishments and challenges. If generated through a top-down dynamic, without engagement from those who have to deliver education services, the results will not be effective, as this will lead to isolated and disarticulated visions. The national goals and strategy should therefore be based on an assessment of what can be done with the existing national and local capacities to respond to local needs. Since it is easy to get lost among

many different interests and needs, the main overall goal of children's educational improvement has to be clear in the mindset of all participants.

Building consensus means creating structured processes to define the national goals, based on democratic, participative and evidence-based principles so that they are credible and long-lasting. The main elements and players of the education system need to **align coherently** following the overall strategy. This requires overcoming one of the challenges that face countries carrying out reforms, which is to make the strategy consistent with the goal so that the actors involved commit to it and the pathway taken leads to the objective. There needs to be much stronger coordination and alignment between SEP and the state authorities, and within SEP itself, for this to happen. The empowerment of actors such as CONAEDU and CONAGO can be a strategy, in addition to the engagement of the Ministry of Economy (*Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público*), as success will also depend on the resources available and how they are used. Mexico needs **venues for ongoing dialogue** between all relevant stakeholders.

Striking a **balance between central efforts at improvement and local and regional initiatives** is a key issue in Mexico. Appropriate distribution of responsibilities and capacity building between the national, regional and local levels can ensure all actors assume the appropriate roles and make decisions on what affects them directly. The effective and efficient operation of the education system can only be achieved with the correct alignment of actors and the means to a common objective.

Another condition for success is the need to **focus on educating, training, developing and supporting the educator workforce**, including teachers and school directors, who are the key actors in promoting improvement in schools. In Mexico, the need for a high quality teacher workforce has encountered economic, political and pedagogic difficulties. This has not been due to a lack of projects or programmes, but is mostly because of lack of capacity, coordination and efficiency in the distribution of resources. This issue is analysed further in Chapters 3 and 4. Furthermore, it is important to develop evaluation approaches that result in effective learning, the professional development of educators and transformation of their practices. Schools need to appropriate the process by understanding that it will benefit schools and teachers rather than stigmatise them.

Up-scaling improvement at the different levels of the education system also requires adequate infrastructure and capacity. **Capacity building needs to permeate all levels of the system** (federal government, the states, local governments and educators). For reforms to be implemented, it is important not only to design them but to revise the structures that will be delivering them. Bureaucratic structures (both of the union and the ministries) have remained untouched and even strengthened, but have not been subject to evaluation or accountability processes.

While low performing schools have been identified, the structures to support improvement have not been modified. Fostering collaborative approaches and clusters to improve the work of intermediate school management, as suggested in Chapter 4, could be useful to increase information and accountability and improve productivity, efficiency and efficacy at this level.

This also involves encouraging the continuous **development of local capacities** for creating, managing and evaluating policies. Staff operating at the intermediate levels of local education systems are not adequately professionalised. Among the reasons for this are the changes of government and the intermittent change of personnel that is associated with this process. There is also a "lack of institutional memory" regarding previous successful experiences and projects. The objective is therefore to develop the skills of middle management staff and to develop mechanisms that foster stability at the state systems through: policy analysis, the study of successful innovations, or the design and monitoring of small scale improvements, among others. As discussed in Chapter 4, it is also important to enhance and support the decision-making capacity at the most fundamental level: the school, which in Mexico has low levels of resources and decision-making power. State and federal

programmes have created fragmented experiences to encourage new school management based on leadership, participation and collegial work. A positive example is the PEC programme, which has the potential to be adapted to better serve more schools in Mexico.

In Mexico there is growing capacity for **evaluation and improvement**, as a result of the development of an increasing number of reliable sources of information. In recent years, there has been growing interest in developing these, as they can help to identify difficulties and establish priorities. Mexico measures students' performance nationally with instruments such as ENLACE, EXCALE and PISA, but there are also local and state efforts to evaluate and assess it.

Despite the relative increase in the information available, some challenges persist. The main one is how to use this information in a balanced way to achieve a better quality of education. There can be a risk that they are seen as means of pressure and lose their role as a tool for improving achievement. This can lead to some schools manipulating tests and not concentrating on improvement. Another challenge may be the interpretation of the information available in the education system. Education results include not just those of standardised examinations; examinations are only part of a more complex process of appraisal of the quality of education and what it provides for students.

Finally, reforms cannot be implemented without considering the central role of the actors involved and enabling them to take **ownership and leadership** of the reforms. The coordination of their knowledge, motivation, vision and competencies will help create and maintain the necessary consensus that will achieve benefits with time. An intelligent leader will put together the right working teams to design strategies. With the team, he/she will aim to understand the different timescales that a policy can involve and the processes required, and will anticipate how other actors may react and foresee options to respond. Finally, five ingredients can be quoted for leaders of reform: humility, pragmatism, courage, conviction and initiative. Experience in implementing policy reforms internationally and in Mexico shows that "reforms must be done walking towards people and talking face to face with them" (Zorrilla, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The development of Mexico's human and social capital is a necessary condition for improving the living conditions of its population and for sustained social and economic progress. In addition, in recent times in Mexico, higher poverty rates, high inequality and more criminal activity are making the development of good quality and equitable basic public education even more of a priority. To respond to this need, there has been an increased focus on education policy in recent years and Mexico will need to continue to do this in a more systematic, consistent and efficient manner.

Some of the key structural challenges identified in Mexico that policy needs to take into consideration are the following:

- A wide range of reforms in the past 20 years have led to improvements in enrolment and to strengthening the quality of education; yet 66% of young people aged 15 to 19 are not in school and student achievement is not sufficient to provide the skills Mexico needs, now and in the future.
- Reform processes have not yet ensured appropriate capacity and distribution of responsibilities across the decentralised system, with unfinished decentralisation and low school autonomy.
- Structural conditions and processes do not favour schools being at the centre of education policies: school days are short, with insufficient effective teaching time, and teaching and leadership quality and support are weak in many schools.

- Schools operate with sparse resources that need to be distributed better across schools. Resources are allocated mostly to staff compensation and schools receive funding mainly through a large number of programmes. One of Mexico's challenges is to optimise the distribution of resources, and to ensure that funding structures and programmes are designed to be used efficiently for schools.
- The complexity of the interaction between different actors within the Mexican education system (for example government at the national, state and local levels, the teachers' union and civil society) has grown. This requires greater capacity and building more institutionalised ways to ensure discussions and consensus-building.

Develop a long-term education strategy

Mexico needs to develop a long-term education strategy to ensure a generally higher level of skills and knowledge that will facilitate economic growth and better living conditions for all Mexicans. One of the first conditions should be to establish **a small number of clear, highest priority and measurable goals focused** on improving student attainment, reducing drop-out rates, ensuring timely graduation (*egreso oportuno*) and reducing inequalities across the education system.

The OECD Mexico Steering Group on School Management and Teacher Policy suggests a set of guiding conditions that can ensure progress in developing this strategy:

- To provide venues for ongoing dialogue and communication among all relevant stakeholders.
- To ensure the alignment of actors and policies through coordination and distribution of responsibilities between the national, regional and local level, and the availability of resources and their efficient use to reach schools. This may also require revising the structures that will be delivering reforms.
- To match the focus on educating, training, developing and supporting the educator workforce with policy decisions and resources.
- To address the development of national, regional and local capacity building for better school management.
- To continue developing reliable sources of information for evaluation and improvement, such as ENLACE, EXCALE, PISA and also local efforts of assessments at the state level.

Place schools and students at the centre of education policy making

The key initial point of reform is **the need to place Mexican schools and students at the centre of education policy making**. Although improving Mexican schools requires action on a number of fronts, research strongly underscores the importance of school leadership and the quality of teaching and learning, and these areas are the central focus of this report. Improving Mexican schools will require a rethink of the governance of the system and the roles of school leaders, school supervisors and teachers.

This requires enhancing the role of teachers; setting clear standards of practice; professionalising their recruitment, selection and evaluation; and linking teachers more directly to school needs. For this to be achieved, teachers need strong initial teacher preparation programmes and continuous professional development based on the needs of the schools where they are working. Chapter 3 proposes a set of recommendations towards consolidating a quality teaching profession in Mexico.

It also calls for redefining and supporting excellent school leadership and management; strengthening the role of school directors by setting clear standards, providing training, professionalised recruitment and autonomy with support. For this to be achieved directors and schools can be helped by working together in partnerships, to share individual excellence and institutional best practice and build capacity. They also need to have a stable, equitable and rational source of funding that responds to the needs of their individual schools and their

students. And they need to have the support and provide accountability to the parents and the community that surrounds them. Chapter 4 proposes a set of recommendations to make school management and leadership more effective in delivering education.

The recommendations proposed require the definition of priorities and a strategy for implementation in the short and long term. Chapter 5 proposes guidance on the short term policy steps so that Mexico can develop a strategy to place schools and students at the centre to support all children and young people to achieve their full learning potential.

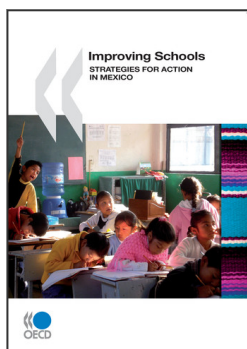
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NOTES

1. The President heads this agreement on behalf of the Executive Power, but the main partner was the Ministry of Education. The Ministries of Health, Finance and Social Development also were partners of the agreement.
2. This is calculated according to the number of weeks and days of instruction allocated to upper secondary education general programmes (OECD, 2010b).
3. In 2000 Mexico invested 23.4% of its total public spending on education.
4. *Fondo de Aportaciones para la Educación Básica*.
5. This makes it the biggest union in Mexico and one of the biggest teacher unions in the world. On average, around one in every 100 Mexicans is affiliated to the SNTE.



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