

## CHAPTER 4

# Improving School Effectiveness in Mexico: The Role of Leadership, Management and Social Participation

*This chapter focuses on how changes in the way schools are led and managed in Mexico could improve their effectiveness. Research evidence shows that the quality of school leadership is fundamental in raising the attainment of students. But instructional leadership is not a prominent feature of Mexican schools. Directors do not have appropriate training, development and incentives to focus on improving the quality of instruction and schools' results, and on strengthening the school's links to the community.*

*The chapter analyses the role of school leadership and the financial and governance structures that support schools. It examines the balance between the leadership, management and administrative functions of school directors and argues for greater local decision-making and accountability. This would involve the development of leadership within the teaching profession, among directors, ATPs and school supervisors and a greater clarity about the role of school directors and other leaders and higher expectations of their contribution to improving teaching and the performance of schools. Without further delay, a national framework for school leadership which sets out the criteria for effective leadership and establishes performance standards is needed. This framework should be used as the benchmark for selecting, training, appointing and developing school and system leaders. The chapter points to ways in which schools can share expertise, good practice and, where necessary, have access to effective leadership from beyond the school. It suggests that the arrangements for funding schools could be reviewed to make them more clear, equitable and transparent. The chapter also discusses how schools could be more accountable to and involved with parents and the community.*

## SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN MEXICO

### **Schools and their leadership**

In Mexico, the director is the person in charge of the functioning, organisation and management of the school. The school director's main tasks are to define goals, strategies and school operation policies; to analyse and solve pedagogical problems that may arise; and to review and to approve the work plans elaborated by teachers. An important part of the director's job also includes managing educational programmes, one of the main ways through which Mexican education is provided. Programmes may have a budget attached, have requirements and there may be time-consuming administrative processes involved in responding to them. Nevertheless, Ornelas (2008) notes that the functions of school directors suffer from imprecise job expectations that lead to excessive routines. According to him:

*"[...] The directors, besides managing the (limited) resources of their schools, are in charge of ensuring the functioning of the Technical Councils (Consejos Técnicos) and the School Councils of Social Participation (Consejos Escolares de Participación Social), or their equivalent. They have the authority – but not the power – to make teachers attend their classes, comply with official programmes and perform students' evaluations. Also, in Carrera Magisterial, they evaluate the performance of their teachers, manage the relationship with the parents' association and are the schools' representatives regarding the higher authorities. The school director also fills in the Form 911 that contains the school's statistics for each cycle, submits information; fills out forms – sometimes with the same data asked for in a different format by another state body. This may mean the completion of more than 100 documents per year. Also, he is responsible for the infrastructure and the arrangements for the tasks of maintenance and cleaning of the school[...]" (Ornelas, 2008).*

The roles and responsibilities of directors were strongly focused on administrative issues rather than improving school outcomes until the National Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Schools (*Evaluación Nacional de Logro Académico en Centros Escolares* or ENLACE) test was introduced recently and students' performance started to be systematically taken into account. Despite this, school directors still tend to see themselves as administrators, not as instructional leaders.

The delegation of management responsibility from the federal government to the states has not progressed significantly to schools, with some exceptions. As one Ministry witness stated: “It is difficult to delegate management decisions and responsibilities down to the directors. Schools are isolated and we have not built a management system that is efficient for schools.”

The director is not necessarily the only person who could be expected to undertake a leadership role. At the secondary level, there is also an assistant director. Larger primary schools and secondary schools also may have technical pedagogical advisors (*asesores técnico pedagógicos*) known as ATPs. They do not have a teaching workload but are supposed to provide support at different levels, for example in pedagogical leadership, in administrative roles, as school deputies or in other capacities. The ATP post does not exist officially; most ATPs hold a teaching post but carry out “ATP functions”, whatever they are. There is an opportunity to incorporate the ATP role into the leadership structure of schools, with appropriate responsibilities and accountabilities. The OECD Steering Group was informed that there are about 50 000 ATPs in the school system, but they do not have a common profile or remit. Relevant professional standards would provide this.

Some administrative functions in schools are undertaken by teachers who do not have formal responsibility for these functions. As a result, their hours of work on administration are not recognised by a performance standard or tangible rewards. It is an improvised system that lacks defined standards of work, a recognised profile or job specification and pay that rewards responsibilities. In its general development plan for this presidential period (*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*), the Government of Mexico has acknowledged as one of its main challenges the need to move towards “real school leadership”.

**Technical Councils** (*Consejos Técnicos*) are established in schools with at least four to five teachers. Their functions include making recommendations on: plans and training programmes, teaching methods, programme evaluation and teacher training, among others. These councils are chaired by the director, and include as appropriate the assistant directors, heads of class or subject, ATPs, presidents of the students’ council, and representatives of the parents’ association, the school cooperative and the school garden plot (where this exists).

**School Councils of Social Participation** (*Consejos Escolares de Participación Social*) have administrative, pedagogic and relational roles. In general terms, these councils’ attributions are limited. For example, they can provide a social perspective but cannot participate in matters related to school staff or their performance. Santizo (2009) points out that although the General Law of Education provides councils with responsibilities, there have been no further instruments to implement the law. Parents’ Associations mainly participate to support the school authorities in the collection of funds and the organisation of voluntary work for tasks related to school maintenance.

**School supervisors** are the main communication channel between the education authorities and the schools. Supervisors are intended to visit and supervise the functioning of schools, provide advice to schools and the authority, and perform diverse administrative and pedagogic tasks. However, administrative tasks take up most of their time.

### ***The appointment and promotion of school and system leaders***

The appointment of school directors, teachers, supervisors and ATPs is done according to the career progression (*Escalafón*), which has been in place since 1973<sup>1</sup>. Only former school directors are eligible for the post of supervisor; ATP appointments are given only to former teachers. The appointments are permanent. Applications are assessed and posts allocated in each state by the *Comisión Nacional Mixta de Escalafón* composed of the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) and representatives of the National Union of Education Workers (*Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* or SNTE). These commissions evaluate candidates according to several criteria, such as: time in service, academic credentials, participation in education projects,

participation in projects to support the community, publications, the design of didactic material, participation in teacher training activities, and previous recognition for teacher performance. This mechanism is, however, influenced by union and political criteria.

Despite candidates having to meet a certain set of formal requirements, the Steering Group learned that school leaders have often been nominated by the SNTE or by the joint *Escalafón* commission SEP-SNTE through non-transparent procedures and criteria. Efforts are currently under way to change this process and make it more transparent. For example, it was announced as part of the Alliance for Quality in Education (*Alianza por la Calidad de la Educación*) that a test for the selection of school directors of basic education would be introduced in 2009, although this has not yet been instituted. A test could lead to more open and objective procedures for the appointment of directors, but appointment should not be based entirely on a test. School leaders should be appointed with due care, equitable procedures and based on merit, not length of service.

Promotion of directors, like teachers, is done through the programme of teacher career ladder (*Carrera Magisterial*), which was originally designed as an incentives system for the teaching workforce. This has one strand for teachers and another for directors. The case of ATPs and supervisors is unusual as their appointments depended traditionally on the growth of the education system. Currently the education system is stable and the number of students has fallen in some states. Those teachers and school directors that are not needed are provided with other tasks. In some cases, school directors may become ATPs.

### ***Policies that encourage leadership of schools***

The Steering Group is aware of a number of policy initiatives at federal, state or school level that focus on the management and leadership of schools. School directors participate in the individual evaluation of teachers at schools as part of the programme of *Carrera Magisterial*. However, because those who participate in this process (as well as in the *Escalafón* evaluation) belong to the union, the process is not necessarily very objective.

School management has been the focus of one of the national programmes targeted at improving the quality of education. The Schools of Quality Programme (*Programa Escuelas de Calidad, PEC*), introduced in 2001, is one of the initiatives that has most emphasised the development of school-centred leadership in Mexico (see Box 2.2 in Chapter 2). It has covered 21% of all schools by 2010. Its main objective is to promote achievement and training in schools and to develop a culture of evaluation and transparency. To this end, the programme promotes the development of strategic management within the administration, organisation, pedagogy and social participation of the school. Technical councils are seen as evaluators that are related to the school, as they organise pedagogic aspects within them. Although these councils review school results periodically, no mechanisms have been defined for them to influence teacher practices in the classroom.

Another of PEC's objectives is the promotion of accountability and transparency in schools. Some studies show that these objectives are promoted by SEP through encouraging parents and community representatives to participate in school activities. The PEC programme brings schools and their parents together to make decisions about the school and plans for its improvement. It also provides some training for school directors. Evaluations of the PEC programme have expressed some reservations about its ability to promote autonomy, or school-centred decision-making, in the Mexican context. Reimers and Cárdenas (2007) argue that:

*“High levels of inequality in the institutional capacity of different schools and in the financial capacity of different communities minimise the likelihood that this school-based management programme might, in the short term, contribute to closing the gaps in educational opportunity for students from different socio-economic groups who are segregated in different types of schools. The heterogeneity in school and community resources*

and capacities conditions the way in which teachers and principals respond to the incentives provided by the programme, with the least changes observed in the least-endowed schools. We posit three key mechanisms that explain why school-based management (SBM) does not close equity gaps in educational opportunity in Mexico:

- first, selection mechanisms, which make entry into the programme more likely for the schools with greater capacity and resources, principally urban schools;
- second, organisational mechanisms at the school level, which make school-based management work better for schools that have adequate leadership and coherence of vision among school staff;
- third, management mechanisms and politics at the system level which undermine local initiative in the most vulnerable schools.”

Besides the PEC programme, schools and school directors have to work with a multiplicity of programmes in order to receive additional support from the Ministry and from the states, as discussed in Table 2.1 in Chapter 2. Examples of these include Safe School (*Escuela Segura*), “Always Open to Community” Schools (*Escuela Siempre Abierta a la Comunidad*), *Enciclopedia*, or the National Reading Programme (*Programa Nacional de Lectura*). Many of these programmes require school leaders to focus their schools on specific targets or problems and provide specific resources in return. Accounting for the correct use of these resources, however, means that the programmes carry a heavy administrative burden.

### **Training, development and certification of school directors**

Training and development are not mandatory but are incentivised by allocating training points to advance up the promotion ladder, as reviewed in Recommendation 7. Some witnesses have expressed to the Steering Group their doubts about the usefulness of the courses, and described the courses in the *Escalafón* and *Carrera Magisterial* as a way to get points but with little relevance to practice. In addition, most of the courses focus on teaching and pedagogy; until recently few have focused on school leadership and management. Points to move up the *Escalafón* do not consider whether training is focused on school leadership. Until now, the preparation and training of school directors has not been a priority in Mexico. Efforts are under way to provide more specific training in school leadership, and the new national catalogue for teacher training includes an important section of courses offered by different institutions focused on school management and leadership in 2010 ([formacioncontinua.sep.gob.mx](http://formacioncontinua.sep.gob.mx)).

One of the key education and training institutions for school leaders in Mexico is the National Pedagogical University (*Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, UPN*). The UPN offers the Specialisation in Teacher Education and Management (*Especialidad en Formación Docente para la Gestión*) in several states. The First National Course for Managers of Primary Education, named “The Director as a School Leader” (*El Director como Líder Académico*) (50 hours) was offered in 2000. It was organised through the National Programme for Permanent Training for in-Service Teachers (*Programa Nacional de Actualización Permanente para Maestros en Servicio*), targeted at primary school directors. It was a distance learning course with the support of the teacher centres (*Centros de Maestros*). The accreditation of this course is taken into account in the *Carrera Magisterial*.

Also, in 2010, at the upper secondary level (a non-mandatory level of education in Mexico and run by a separate division within the Ministry), the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) will launch the Training Programme for Upper Secondary Education Directors (*Programa de Formación de Directores de Educación Media Superior*) for all 7 500 directors of schools of secondary education and 5 000 directors of private schools. The programme consists of a Diploma of Training Directors (*Diplomado de Formación de Directores*) for that level. From 2011, everyone who has successfully passed it may take the test for a director position.

In the case of school directors in basic education, some steps have been taken to develop certification for directors within the realm of the PEC programmes. Director certification involves creating a set of standards that describe the competencies or levels of performance required of directors. The objective is to prepare a Technical Norm of Labour Competency for School Directors of Basic Education (*Norma técnica de competencia laboral para los directores de educación de básica*), currently being developed. The Technical Norm is to include three types of competencies that the school director should have to coordinate: elaboration; execution; and follow-up and evaluation of the five-yearly strategic plans of schools (*Plan Estratégico de Transformación Escolar*, PETE). This approach is used increasingly across countries, for example in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Austria, or Australia (Santizo Rodall, 2009). For 2012, the government's goal is to certify 50 000 school directors through collaboration with SNTE and civil society, although these developments are slow and have not yet been introduced.

### ***The challenge: building leadership capacity and culture across the system***

There are real challenges in terms of developing the leadership capacity needed to ensure school progress. This is so because there has not been much investment in ensuring effective preparation and selection of school leaders or clarification of the roles that they are expected to play in combining administrative and pedagogical tasks. If the school is to be the focus of education, it is necessary for schools to be well led and managed. For this to happen consistently in every school, clarity is required about the role and expectations of the director as school leader.

The Steering Group learned about intentions to develop or articulate a set of occupational standards for school leaders, aligned with the process of development of standards which was piloted in 2008/09 across Mexico. There is a need to define the role of school directors and other leaders and to set occupational standards in terms of instructional leadership and performance-focused management to improve school outcomes. The current draft standards define five basic categories: school leadership; collective performance of the teaching team; management of the learning process; functioning of official units supporting schools (school councils and technical councils); and social participation.

Overall, there is a compelling case for building leadership capacity. This means defining school leadership as distinct from management, identifying teachers with leadership potential, providing leadership opportunities, training leaders and ensuring that the teachers who become directors have demonstrated their leadership knowledge and competence. The goal should be to create a system-wide culture of leadership. This will only be achieved when there are clear improvements in leadership capacity across the system. Defining the role of school directors in terms of leadership and management and setting occupational standards is an important first step for school improvement.

In addition, schools and school leaders need support to obtain the knowledge, tools and strategies necessary to assure the quality of education provided by their schools. Schools cannot work as isolated islands, but need to work within a recognised network where problems and solutions can be shared so that all schools progress. In Mexico, the main avenue of support for schools is through school supervisors employed by each state and sometimes through ATPs. Supervisors' roles were described to the OECD Steering Group as "firstly – political, secondly – managerial, and thirdly – educational". Witnesses stated that "supervisors do not exert control mechanisms because the teachers are fellow unionists. They don't provide pedagogical support because they are not prepared to. Both control and support are needed."

The use of supervisors, advisors or inspectors is common in the administration of education in many countries. While many supervisors in Mexico have good professional credibility and sound understanding of effective practice, their expertise is often limited to curriculum leadership rather than school leadership. Since they no longer work from a school, they may also lack the ability to show or demonstrate good practice or draw upon

other expertise which resides in good schools. Supervisors nevertheless have an important role in arranging or brokering the kind of school-to-school support that will help in particular cases.

After a careful review of the circumstances in which schools and school directors currently operate in Mexico, through the analysis of data, through interviews and study visits in Mexico, the Steering Group finds that there is a set of clear challenges related to the leadership and management of schools:

- The need to focus on improving school performance and identify, use and share best practice and new developments;
- The need to build leadership capacity and establish a leadership culture;
- The need to define the role of school directors in terms of leadership and management and to set occupational standards;
- The need to train and develop school leaders and ensure that they are appointed on professional merit;
- The need to reduce inequities between schools serving richer and poorer communities, providing comparable resources for learning;
- The need to provide greater accountability and responsiveness to the community;
- The need to maximise the use of information, data and new technologies to support learning.

Having taken account of relevant features of the school system in Mexico, together with the factors that most contribute to improving school effectiveness described in Chapter 1, the Steering Group offers six recommendations for improving the support for leadership and management of schools.

**RECOMMENDATION 9: Develop a framework of occupational standards for school leadership and management focused on improving school outcomes**

*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.*

**Context**

In Mexican schools, the balance of the school director's role currently weighs heavily in favour of administration rather than professional leadership. Directors claim that their administrative load includes extensive bureaucratic demands: excessive completion of forms and responding to central programmes. Participation in national programmes brings extra funding and other resources into the school, and for many schools this is essential in remaining financially viable. This burden of administration is due to a school system that is largely micromanaged from the federal or state centre. Curriculum programmes and school supervisors are the instruments of control. This infrastructure is not working effectively to improve performance, as the *Alianza* recognises. It is necessary to redefine the role of school directors so that they are clearly the lead professionals in the schools for which they are responsible. To improve results, school leaders must be leaders of instruction, focused on raising the effectiveness of every teacher and the achievement of every child. A framework of occupational standards would clarify the role of directors and what is expected of them.

Until recently, attention to school leadership has not been a high priority in Mexico, except for the efforts of the PEC programme, as well as the recent efforts to develop standards by the Under-Secretary of Basic Education to which the Steering Group refers in Recommendation 1 in Chapter 3. In the case of school management standards, the main elements that comprise the preliminary proposal are described in Box 4.1.

**Box 4.1 School management standards for basic education – preliminary proposal by the Ministry**

Recent efforts by SEP to develop a set of school management standards for basic education in Mexico have led to a preliminary proposal that includes five main areas:

- **School direction:** Effective leadership; environment of trust; teaching commitment; shared decisions; institutional planning; self-assessment; performance communication; and school networks.
- **Collective performance of the teaching team:** Fostering pedagogic improvement; and shared pedagogic planning.
- **Learning management:** The centrality of learning; learning commitment; and equity in learning opportunities.
- **Official support organisations:** Effective functioning of the school's technical council; and effective functioning of the school's social participation council.
- **Social participation:** Participation of family parents; and support for learning at home.

Source: Secretaría de Educación Pública (2010), *Communication with the Steering Group*, Mexico.

The definition of the role of school directors, their selection and recruitment, their training and development, as well as their career perspectives, have been limited in many OECD countries beyond Mexico (OECD, 2008). In Mexico, as cited earlier, school directors' jobs fall under a regulation from 1973 (*Escalafón*), which may not recognise the new roles they need to play. There are ongoing efforts to define a norm or standard for basic education, and for school leadership and management, but with little urgency and few tangible results. It has only been recently that the important role of school leadership has been raised as a policy issue.

The issue is not confined to school directors. Other educational staff who work with or in schools have unclear roles in school leadership. ATPs are said to play different roles in schools, including acting as vice-directors, pedagogical leaders, evaluators or providing administrative support. For example, one ATP spent the morning in an elementary school with no classes to teach, then taught four classes in the afternoon in a second school. He had no desire to become a director, since his earnings would be less. In the morning school, he appeared to be a more important figure than the new temporary director, promoted from among the staff. ATPs appear to be an under-recognised resource. There is little evidence of the contribution – if any – they make to improving the schools they work in. Their role could be strengthened and recognised as part of the leadership structure of schools. The system cannot afford to support ATP posts that are lacking a clearly defined role in the leadership of schools.

The changes that are required to bring about the continuous and sustained improvement which the country seeks cannot happen overnight. They require a guiding vision, an effective strategy, good communications and the concerted efforts of leaders who subscribe to the mission and have the courage and conviction to carry it forward. This is necessary at system level, but also applies to the leadership and management of each and every school. The guiding vision must put the child, the school and the family at the heart of the education system.

**Research and international evidence**

Reference has been made earlier to the role of leadership as described by research into school effectiveness. A recent OECD report (OECD, 2008) on the impact of school leadership on improving school outcomes found that school leadership can make a difference to student outcomes by creating the right environment for teachers to improve classroom practice and student learning. Research evidence shows that there are specific leadership roles that have a greater influence on teaching and learning than others. In practice, however, school leaders



can only have an impact on student outcomes if they have enough autonomy and support to make important decisions and if their major responsibilities are well-defined and focused on teaching and learning (Pont, 2010; Toledo Figueroa, 2010).

The definition of core leadership responsibilities should be guided by existing research into the leadership practices most likely to improve teaching and learning, taking account of the Mexican context. In many other countries there is a lack of clarity about the core tasks school leaders should dedicate their time to. Improved definitions of core leadership responsibilities can provide a firm foundation for the profession and constitute a key point of reference both for those who consider entering the profession and for those in charge of recruiting, training and evaluating them (OECD, 2008).

Sammons (1995) suggests that the quality and role of leaders, who they are and what they do, is more important than the style in which they do it. Her review identifies “three characteristics which have frequently been associated with successful leadership: strength of purpose (firmness), involving other staff in decision-making (a participative approach) and professional authority in the processes of teaching and learning” (or pedagogic leadership – the school director as the leading professional). Outstanding leaders tend to be proactive. In effective schools, directors place great emphasis on the selection and recruitment of staff, the development of staff in post and the importance of consensus and consistency in the quality of teaching and consistency of staff behaviour and practices (Barber and Mourshed, 2007). Firm leadership challenges unhelpful changes and has a key role in initiating and maintaining the school improvement process.

The participative approach is shown through sharing of leadership responsibilities with other staff (see Hargreaves and Fink (2006) for a discussion of distributed and sustainable leadership). An effective director should also be the leading professional in the school. As Sammons finds, “this implies knowledge about what goes on in the classroom, including the curriculum, teaching strategies and the monitoring of pupils’ progress”. It involves the director projecting a high profile, through actions such as frequent movement through the school, visits to the classroom and informal conversations with staff. It also requires assessing how well teachers are functioning.

The director has a very important role in ensuring that there are positive expectations of pupil achievement among teachers, pupils and parents. It is well established that if teachers set high standards for their pupils, let them know that they are expected to meet them, and provide intellectually challenging lessons to correspond to these expectations, then the impact on achievement can be considerable. It is particularly important to discourage attitudes which use the disadvantaged backgrounds of some children to excuse slow progress and low achievement. Recent studies (such as Matthews, 2009a; Matthews, 2009b; Matthews, 2009c) have shown that leadership which sets high expectations and aspirations is among the factors that enable schools in very challenging circumstances to become consistently excellent.

A review of the literature on school leadership (Leithwood *et al.*, 2006) made “seven strong claims” about successful school leadership. These claims are all supported by “quite robust empirical evidence, the first two having attracted the largest amount of such evidence”. The paper challenges those in leadership roles with the responsibility for acting on this knowledge.

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.

5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
7. A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.

To illustrate one perspective of effective school leadership, a practising superintendent in the USA wrote that “the role of leadership is to maintain the school community’s energy and nurture the core purpose of increasing the ability of all children and preparing students for the future” (Box 4.2.)

#### Box 4.2 Principles of “leadership for excellence”

Middleton (2001) offers some principles for “leadership for excellence”, shown here with brief explanations or examples.

- Focus on instructional leadership: A head’s first role is to engage teachers in determining and articulating a vision of excellence for all students.
- Value connections: Where teachers and directors consider themselves to be a community, they engage in dialogue and discussion about teaching and learning.
- Understand the ground: The leaders must develop awareness of what is going on both inside and out of the school’s community, have good knowledge of the working relationship of staff and understand how others view the school.
- Envelop a problem: Leaders must internalise a “map” or vision for the school community and be able to anticipate problems, interruptions and changes to the school’s instructional programme.
- Be resilient: leaders in schools must have the passion necessary to always be reliable for others and tirelessly persistent to the goal.
- Encourage leadership: A vital role for leaders is to mentor peers as potential leaders. By sharing with each other, leaders develop support groups and “think tanks” to explore new ideas.
- Enjoy the challenge: To be an effective school leader, one must truly have a passion for helping people learn and must be convinced that teaching can make a very real difference to all groups of students.

The point of instructional leadership is that it is focused on the processes of teaching and learning and how effective they are. Southworth (2009) found that, ultimately, school leaders influence through three related strategies:

- *Modelling, which is all about the power of example. Good directors are strong believers in setting an example because they know this influences students and colleagues alike. Good leaders must be prepared to do what they ask others to do. Effective leaders are ‘on show’. Leaders who do not take an interest in learning and classrooms are quickly judged by their colleagues to be uninterested in teaching. By contrast, leaders who visit classrooms, encourage colleagues to talk about their teaching successes and concerns, and ensure that meetings of teachers focus on learning, demonstrate that they remain strongly connected to classrooms.*
- *Monitoring, which includes analysing and acting on data and other evidence of students’ progress and outcomes (for example, assessment and test scores, evaluation data, school performance trends, parental opinion surveys, student and staff attendance data and student interview information). Leaders should discuss the meaning of these data with those who are responsible for it, and should act on it.*
- *Dialogue, which is about creating opportunities for teachers to talk with their colleagues and leaders about learning and teaching. There is a lot of talk in schools, but often too little conversation about learning and teaching.*

Leadership standards should therefore be written so as to require the sort of behaviour described above. They should not be simply about tasks but about processes, responsibilities and accountabilities. Standards should set high expectations for leaders and promote good leadership practice. They should encourage leaders to lead the development and improvement of their colleagues. Teachers do not arrive in schools as the finished article. They need to be lifelong learners, and good leaders ensure that they are.

The OECD *Improving School Leadership* report (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008a; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008b) has identified four core responsibilities of school leadership based on the empirical analysis of which roles make a difference in improving school outcomes.

### **1. Supporting, evaluating and developing the expertise of teachers**

Improving the quality of teaching and learning is central to school improvement, raising the academic achievement of all pupils and reducing attainment gaps both within and between schools. The evidence points to the roles and tasks of directors regarding teachers. For example, the key role of a director that makes the most difference in improving school results is to support, evaluate and develop teachers as part of the development of the school. Within this role, the OECD identifies four important components:

**a. Managing the curriculum and teaching programme:** Most countries establish a core curriculum at the national level. National policy is often further specified at regional or municipal level. It is the leader's job to implement the school curriculum within these policy boundaries in a manner that achieves the intended curriculum objectives for their specific context. School leaders generally have a measure of discretion in how they design curriculum content and sequencing, organise teaching and instructional resources and monitor quality. In Mexico, curriculum decisions are taken by central government and implemented via defined programmes throughout very diverse social and cultural realities that predominate in the country. Giving schools a greater say in curricular decision-making allows for tailoring education and making it significant to different cultural and regional groups, and thus seems to be positively related to student performance, provided schools have the confidence and capacity to make this type of decision.

**b. Teacher monitoring and evaluation:** The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2009) survey showed that of 18 countries reporting on teacher monitoring and evaluation, there were formal provisions for teacher evaluation in 14 countries, including Mexico, although the form, rigour, content and consequences of teacher evaluation varied widely. Most of the countries indicated that teacher monitoring and evaluation are important responsibilities carried out by school leaders. Several research studies indicate that school leader involvement in classroom observation and feedback seems to be associated with better student performance.

**c. Supporting teacher professional development:** School leadership also plays a vital part in promoting and participating in professional learning and development of teachers. The balance between school-based and out-of-school professional development has moved strongly in favour of school-based professional development in recent years (Musset, 2010). The OECD (2005) report *Teachers Matter* noted that school-based professional development activities involving the entire staff or significant groups of teachers were becoming much more common, and teacher-initiated personal development probably less so. Most countries now link professional development to the developmental priorities of the school and coordinate the in-service education in the school accordingly. The most persuasive evidence of the impact of school leaders' involvement in promoting and participating in teacher learning and development is probably that of Robinson's 2007 meta-analysis of six research studies (Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2008). She identified the participation of the school leader as the "leading learner" in staff development as being strongly associated with improved student outcomes.

**d. Supporting collaborative work cultures:** This is an increasingly important and recognised responsibility of school leaders in several countries. It involves fostering teamwork among teachers and creating environments in which student learning is the central focus. Policy makers can promote and encourage teamwork among school staff by explicitly recognising the core role of school leaders in building collaborative cultures and disseminating and sharing best practice in this aspect.

## **2. Goal-setting, assessment and accountability**

School leadership that is focused on goal-setting, assessment and evaluation can positively influence teacher and student performance. School leaders play a key role in ensuring the accountability of the school by supporting their teaching staff in aligning instruction with agreed learning goals and performance standards. Equally, schools that have systems for monitoring pupils' progress against their personal targets are better placed to give the individual support and intervention that may be needed if progress falters.

In most countries there is a tradition of external evaluation or school inspection, increasingly complemented by school self-evaluation or the use of measurements of student performance. Recent research emphasises high learning standards and strong accountability systems as key to improving student learning and achievement (Hanushek and Raymond, 2005). In Mexico, there is little evidence of real accountability attributed to school leaders. School administration over-rides instructional leadership and teachers are secure in their jobs for life.

One of the expectations of a school director should be that they have the authority and the experience to challenge the under-performance of a teacher. If a teacher repeatedly arrives late, is not punctual in arriving at lessons or cuts them short, does not plan teaching and learning and does not assess the work of pupils adequately, the director must talk to the teacher about such matters and say what must be done. There seem to be no ultimate sanctions in Mexico, however – not even for teachers who have improper relationships with children. The Steering Group was told that neither incompetence nor unprofessional behaviour result in dismissal.

Research shows that schools are more effective when staff build a consensus on the aims and values of the school and put these into practice through consistent and collaborative ways of working. The director is key to setting these school norms and thus reducing variation in the quality of teaching of different groups which has been shown to be a direct cause of underperforming schools. For all the reasons above, the Steering Group is convinced that there needs to be a clear national definition of the role and expectations of school directors and other leaders in the system, which takes account of the diversity of schools and contexts and which underpins everything they do.

## **3. Strategic financial and human resource management**

Policy makers can enhance the financial management skills of school leadership teams by providing training to school leaders, establishing the role of a financial manager within the leadership team, or providing financial support services to schools. In addition, school leaders should be able to influence decisions on teacher recruitment to improve the match between candidates and their school's needs.

A wealth of research shows that school effectiveness is highly dependent on effective classroom teaching; the quality and quantity of teaching and learning. There are positive correlations between learning time – or time on task – and pupil outcomes (and behaviour). There can be little doubt that the erosion of learning time through “shortened hours”, teacher absenteeism and poor punctuality in Mexican schools contributes directly to inadequate learning outcomes. Therefore, the key role of directors should be to focus on human resource management. In some countries where there is more autonomy, this may require selecting staff for the school. In

Mexico, staff selection may not be possible in the short term, but an adequate management of staff to improve their performance is still vital.

#### **4. Working beyond the school borders: other schools, school councils and parents**

This new leadership dimension needs to be recognised as a specific role for school leaders. It can bring benefits to school systems as a whole rather than just the students of a single school. But school leaders need to develop their skills to become involved in matters beyond their school borders. In addition, they have to work with the representatives of community around them and also with parents, to strengthen ties between parents and the schools. There has been little high value research into social participation in schools. Sammons found that “effective schools research generally shows that supportive relationships and cooperation between home and school have positive effects”, and there are benefits of schools that encourage parents’ involvement in their children’s learning (Coleman and Others, 1993). When considering forms of social participation in schools more widely, there is little direct evidence of the contribution of school councils, boards or governing bodies to school improvement. Where such bodies make important decisions, like selecting the school director, their choice can be the most important decision they make. But in countries like England where governing bodies have this power, there is still a need to ensure that they only appoint candidates who have achieved the National Professional Qualification for Headship.

#### **How to develop a framework of occupational standards for school leadership and management focused on improving school outcomes**

School leadership is among the keys to effective schools and there are specific leadership responsibilities that lead to improving school results across OECD countries. In Mexico, a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of school leaders is needed to ensure that the wide variety of schools in Mexico have a shared and common understanding of what it means to be a school leader. Any definition of school leadership responsibilities should be informed by:

- Those parts of the school leader’s role that research and international practice have shown to have greatest impact on the quality of teaching and learning, which are those focused on supporting, evaluating and working with teachers in doing their job and challenging underperformance;
- An evidence-informed view about the professional role of leaders in the Mexican school system, including how much autonomy they have to make decisions;
- A strategic vision of how the Mexican school system should evolve.

It is sensible to adopt a systematic approach to creating standards for school leaders, based on consensus and on work already done in other countries or within Mexico. Examples are given from other countries that may be used as a basis for developing leadership and management standards in Mexico (Table 4.1). The Steering Group understands that there has been some work in Mexico on developing standards for school directors and believes that completion of this work should be an urgent, short-term objective. The process of defining a set of standards for directors calls for different stages. It is important first that Mexico works to reach a common and shared perspective on what is the core purpose of a director. Next, this core purpose needs to be translated into core areas of competence, and then be made into clear actionable statements for directors.

The important step is to agree on a leadership framework quickly. It does not have to be perfect; it just has to be in place. The OECD Steering Group encountered examples of strong school leadership while in Mexico. Ideally, the development of a leadership framework should take account of the best existing practice in Mexico, if this is known. It is also advisable to take account of best international practice by adapting an existing framework of standards for school directors. When this preliminary framework is put in place, it should be accompanied

with feedback mechanisms. These will help to gradually adapt the framework through its socialisation, so it corresponds to the schools' and teachers' needs and creates consensus. The examples of Chile and Ontario show the importance of implementing standards throughout a process of dialogue among local and national stakeholders.

### 1. What is the role or core purpose of the school director?

The first question for Mexico is about its vision for school leaders. What should school leaders be doing in order to help schools improve? In order that Mexico can define competencies or standards for its school leaders, it is necessary that there is absolute clarity about the core purpose of school leaders. The system needs to agree on this. School directors need to know exactly what is expected of them. One definition of the core purpose of school leaders is found in the National Professional Standards for Headteachers in England, UK (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). Once there is a clear understanding about the school director's role, it is necessary to decide the key areas of competence which are required if school leaders are to undertake their role effectively.

### 2. What competencies does a school director need?

Several countries have specified the role of the school leader in terms of areas of competence and these present common patterns (Table 4.1). Middleton's (2001) description of these formal areas is included in Box 4.2. Two examples are the content areas of Austria's leadership academy (Schatz, 2009) and the National Professional Qualifications for Headteachers (NPQH) in England. Note the similarities between the two. In Latin America, Chile has developed the *Marco para la buena dirección* (Good Directors' Framework), and has been using it for at least the last five years. At present they are validating the Good Supervision Framework. In Ontario, the School Leadership Framework presents five clear and succinct key areas of competence, based on those used in England. These are well known by all actors, adapted to local contexts as needed, used in a new director appraisal system and used for training and development.

Table 4.1

#### International examples of areas of competence for school directors

Examples of areas of competence for school directors		
Leadership Academy, Austria	Ontario School Leadership Framework	National Professional Qualification for Headteachers, England
Strategic leadership Instructional leadership Human resource management Organisational development Change management Aspects of lifelong learning Administrative	Setting direction Building relationships and developing people Developing the organisation Leading the instructional programme Securing accountability	Shaping the future (strategically) Leading learning and teaching (see Table 4.2) Developing self and others Managing the school Securing accountability Strengthening community

In England, the standards have a range of uses. They "assist in the recruitment of headteachers and in performance management processes. They provide guidance to all school stakeholders in what should be expected from the role of the headteacher and are also used to identify threshold levels of performance" (Department for Education and Skills, 2004).

### Box 4.3 The core purpose of the director

The core purpose is to provide professional leadership and management for a school. This will promote a secure foundation from which to achieve high performance in all areas of the school's work. To gain this success a director must establish a high quality of education by providing instructional leadership, effectively managing teaching and learning and using personalised learning to realise the potential of all pupils. Directors must establish a culture that promotes excellence, equality and high expectations for all pupils.

*Source:* Department for Education and Skills (2004), National Professional Standards for Headteachers, Ref: DfES/0083/2004, Department for Education and Skills, London .

## 2. What competencies does a director need?

An approach to analysing the work of directors as a lever for managing and improving schools is to look at each area of their work in terms of:

- Actions: what they may be required to do, which dictate the
- Knowledge, understanding and skills, they require, and the
- Personal and professional characteristics needed.

This classification is similar to many others used in defining occupational standards. An example is the key area "leading learning and teaching", which is commonly found in leadership standards (often termed "instructional" leadership, "pedagogical" leadership and so on). School directors have a central responsibility for raising the quality of teaching and learning and for pupils' achievement. This implies setting high expectations and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes. The framework for standards for directors (headteachers) in England also sets out in each key area the knowledge requirements and professional qualities headteachers should bring to the role, as illustrated below, together with examples of the "actions" expected of a school headteacher (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). Table 4.2 illustrates the knowledge, qualities and actions expected of the area "Leading teaching and learning" in the English standards.

Table 4.2

**Leading teaching and learning: National Standards for Headteachers in England (NPQH)**

Knowledge of:	Professional qualities:	Actions:
Strategies for raising achievement and achieving excellence	Consistently helps others to improve as teachers and learners, based on assessment of identified learning needs and barriers to learning.	Ensures a culture of challenge and support where all pupils and staff can achieve success and become engaged in their own learning.
Theories and models of learning and teaching; personalised learning	Demonstrates personal enthusiasm for and a commitment to the learning process as a highly effective practitioner.	Monitors, evaluates and reviews the quality of teaching and learners' progress, promotes improvement and follows up the action taken.
Effective teaching and assessment for learning	Establishes creative and innovative approaches to effective learning and teaching.	Expects excellence and challenges individual underperformance.
Behaviour and attendance management		
Curriculum management		
Data gathering and analysis		
Excellence as a practitioner		
Development of effective teachers		
Inclusion and special needs		

A leadership framework can thus be developed which identifies key areas of leadership competence, then specifies for each area the leadership actions that are expected and the knowledge and professional qualities the leader is expected to have, taking account of best practice in Mexico and internationally. Another example is the Northern Ireland National Standards for Headteachers, developed in 2005. This framework informs objectives, provides guidance on the role that is expected for a school director and identifies threshold levels of performance for assessment. It is not only used by directors, but is also a reference for the professional development of senior and middle managers who may wish to become headteachers. As a result, it is increasingly being used to create job descriptions for school leaders. It serves also as an instrument for self-evaluation of school leaders at an individual and school level, providing a continuous professional development record established by the Regional Training Unit.

Other important leaders in the Mexican system are the ATPs and the supervisors. Their roles should also be clearly described, and what is understood as good leadership at each level included in the framework of leadership standards. There are international examples of such standards. For example, there are standards in England for educators working as "school improvement professionals" (National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants, 2005). These education workers have similar functions to those of school supervisors in Mexico. In England, they have been defined as follows:

- Professional leadership to build capacity;
- Promoting learning;
- Developing self and others;
- Working with and developing organisations;
- Accountability – evaluating practice;
- Developing and sustaining partnerships.



We see many advantages to Mexico building a leadership culture that seeks to identify, develop and promote teachers with leadership qualities. School ATPs could join directors, supervisors and inspectors as part of the vertical career progression (*Escalafón*). It is desirable that ATP posts have a clearly defined function in the leadership structure of the Mexican education system.

Leadership standards can be visualised as one element of a trio, all of which combine in effective schools: standards of attainment for students; standards for effective teaching; and standards for effective leadership and management (Figure 3.4).

The development of standards for teaching and leadership advocated in the recommendations contained in this publication complements work being undertaken in Mexico to develop new curriculum standards from pre-school to secondary levels already referred to in Chapter 3 (Posner, 2010).

**RECOMMENDATION 10: Professionalise the training, selection and recruitment of school leaders based on the leadership standards**

*As the skills a school director needs are different from those required by a teacher, the system needs to grow leaders using standards as their starting point. 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 candidates, all of whom are qualified in terms of meeting the standards.*

**Context**

Defining the role of school directors in terms of leadership and management and setting occupational standards are central to school improvement in Mexico. The system is far from having a school leadership culture, but this must be one goal. It will only be achieved when there are clear improvements in leadership capacity across the system. At present, training and appointments to posts at all levels in the system are not consistent with a concept of schools and school leadership that responds to today's needs. Appointments, for example, are based on length of service rather than on merit and too often have an element of patronage. This is a particular issue when appointing directors – who need to have the qualities, skills and integrity to take the key role as instructional leaders of their schools, and supervisors who should bring successful school leadership and a wider perspective to their work in developing staff and helping schools to improve.

There have been few formal requirements for teachers wishing to become school directors. The *Escalafón* sets the conditions required to get a promotion to school leader, but in practice the procedures for promotion to managerial positions are not transparent. We learned that often school leaders have been nominated by the SNTE or by the joint *Escalafón* commission rather than appointed on merit against clear criteria. A new test for the selection of school directors has been proposed as part of the reforms promoted by the *Alianza*. We are concerned, therefore, about lack of transparency in the appointment of directors.

Additionally, the professional ladder of promotion to become a director or a supervisor is based on courses included in a national catalogue, 80% of which refer to curriculum contents and do not focus specifically on school leadership. Many witnesses expressed doubts about the usefulness of the courses, and described the courses in the *Escalafón* and *Carrera Magisterial* as a way to get points but with little relevance to practice. Indeed, the training that school directors have received until now is very limited and narrow, such as training focused on provision for vulnerable groups. Participants in the PEC programme have had greatest access to

such development opportunities. Professional development is still mainly focused on the teacher rather than the director or the supervisor. School leaders need to receive special training in order to exercise the roles required of them to achieve the school quality that Mexico needs.

### **Research and international evidence**

International evidence supports the principle that the school system benefits from professionalising school leaders by providing them with better training, and by selecting and recruiting them in a professional manner based on merit. It is widely recognised that school leaders may not be well prepared to exercise their role directly after being a teacher. Being a school director or leader requires a set of skills and expertise that teaching experience alone may not provide. There is evidence from directors across OECD countries that when taking up their posts school directors do not feel that they are ready or have had the appropriate training for it.

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the impact of leadership training and development on leadership effectiveness. There is consensus among practitioners, researchers and policy makers that professional training and development have an impact on participants by improving leaders' knowledge, skills and dispositions. This can contribute to more competent and effective leadership behaviours and eventually lead to improvements in teaching and learning (Moorman, 1997; Evans and Mohr, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Educational Governance, 1999; Davis *et al.*, 2005; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2007).

For example, research commissioned by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (NCSL, the National College in the United Kingdom) into the impact of its leadership development programmes (attended by 120 000 participants since 2000) shows that schools engaged with the College's leadership development programmes have improved more quickly:

- Results at age 11 in schools that have engaged with at least one of the College's development programmes increased by 2.7% between 2005 and 2009, compared with a 1.9% improvement in schools that had not engaged.
- Results at age 16 of schools that had engaged increased by 8.1% between 2005 and 2009, compared with a 5.8% improvement in schools that had not engaged.

In England, since 2009 all aspiring headteachers must pass the National Professional Qualification for Headship. To prepare for it, they need to follow a preparatory training for school leadership based on six areas of national standards, as well as on current policy and research. This course, which has changed recently, had a typical duration of 15 months and was provided by the NCSL. The methodology is varied: face-to-face tutorials, residential meetings, self-study, in-school work, peer and tutor support, online learning and online communities. The new programme includes an internship in another school. The following NCSL evidence shows that the differential impact is greater for schools led by a director who has been awarded the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH).

- 43% of schools led by an NPQH graduate showed an improvement in the leadership and management rating in their Ofsted inspection between 2005 and 2008, compared with only 33% of non-NPQH led schools.
- 43% of schools led by an NPQH graduate showed an improvement in their overall Ofsted rating between 2005 and 2008, compared with only 37% of non-NPQH led schools.
- 48% of schools led by an NPQH graduate from the point of entering special measures<sup>2</sup> came out within one calendar year during 2004-08, compared to only 38% of non-NPQH led schools.
- 67% of primary schools led by an NPQH graduate throughout the period 2004-08 saw an improvement in their results for 11 year-olds compared with 59% in all other schools.

- 76% of schools led by an NPQH graduate throughout the period 2005-08 saw an improvement in their results for 16 year-olds compared with 72% in all other schools.

### ***How to professionalise the training, selection and recruitment of school leaders based on the leadership standards***

The leadership standards framework defined in the previous recommendation will have considerable benefits for human resource management in the school system. It will provide a national benchmark for what is an effective director, and a guide for aligning various leadership strategies. The standards will provide an important guide to building leadership capacity. This means defining school leadership as distinct from management or administration, identifying teachers with leadership potential, providing leadership opportunities, training leaders and ensuring that the teachers who become directors have demonstrated their leadership knowledge and competence. The system needs to grow leaders. Applying the leadership framework involves:

- Providing a basis for training of new school leaders and the professional development of existing ones;
- Supporting schools in encouraging, growing and developing leadership skills within the staff;
- Providing a basis for the equitable appointment of directors on merit;
- Using the framework when assessing or appraising the performance of school leaders;
- Demonstrating to the profession and the public what is expected of school leaders.

#### *Training and developing leaders*

In school leadership development programmes, effective training and preparation for directors usually involves both on-the-job training and joint events for a group of leaders. The workplace element requires a mentor, normally the director, who would ensure that the aspiring director gained experience in the main elements of the school leadership role set out in the Standards. The off-site aspect would bring trainees together for development sessions in which good practice is shared and technical aspects explained.

There are already some promising training initiatives for school leaders in parts of Mexico, including the states of Aguascalientes, Jalisco (see Box 4.4) and Yucatán. The issue is how to know which training initiatives are most relevant to schools and how to ensure funding to support the training for directors not included in *Carrera Magisterial* or *Escalafón*. It is important for Mexico then to decide where to invest more: in initial director training or in continuing training of its current school directors. An estimation of the age and number of school directors and a diagnosis can help understand which of the two would have broader results across the system.

#### *The continuing professional development of school leaders*

Leadership development needs to be seen as a continuum. This implies: 1) encouraging leadership initial training; 2) organising induction programmes; and 3) 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. The objectives should be to:

- Ensure coherence of provision by different institutions;
- Ensure appropriate variety for effective training;
- Ensure that all leadership development programmes are of the highest possible quality and relevance.

**Box 4.4 Competence certification for school directors in the state of Jalisco**

The Education Ministry of Jalisco has created a programme at the state level focused on fostering three dimensions of school directors' work:

- organisational-administrative
- pedagogic-curricular
- social-community.

The programme has developed an approach of "combined training" (*formación por alternancia*) that allows directors to combine participation in a formal course of 36 sessions (*formación presencial*) distributed along the school year, with six tutoring sessions received at the place of work, virtual advising, and other training activities created according to their specific contexts.

The first stage of the programme was the selection and preparation of trainers. During the second stage, about 800 school directors have received a formal training course since the implementation of the programme in 2007, and 21 training centres have been created for this purpose. A mid-term objective is the establishment of a three-year follow up of those school directors having taken the course, for their certification. The Education Ministry of Jalisco expects this programme to eventually cover the population of 3 500 school directors within the state. Other goals are the standardisation of fundamental processes taking place inside the school, and the generalisation of the use of the School Education Projects (*Proyecto Educativo Escolar*) as a tool for school improvement.

Among the positive elements observed by school directors in this programme is that relevant training courses are now available in their region of work. They also considered useful the support received from tutors, as otherwise they "tend to feel alone". However, they also considered that more support to attend courses should be provided from supervisors.

*Source:* Secretaría de Educación de Jalisco (2007), Programa de Formación de Directivos por Competencias, Executive Summary, Gobierno del Estado de Jalisco, Guadalajara, Mexico.

*Appointment of directors*

The OECD Mexico Steering Group believes that appointments for directors should, where possible, be made from a shortlist of candidates, all of whom are qualified in terms of meeting the standards for school leadership. All shortlisted candidates are therefore presumed capable of doing the job of school director. There should be objective procedures to find suitable candidates, which take account of tests, portfolios and their track record. It should be the responsibility of the states to ensure that each school is led by a properly qualified and trained director. Where there is a vacancy, they should convene an appointment panel. It is desirable that the school community is involved in choosing the director, possibly through representatives of parents or the school council. The appointment panel has the job of deciding which candidate will be best for the school and its needs. The Steering Group suggests that the appointment panel includes representatives from: i) the regional administration; ii) teachers at the school; and iii) parents of pupils attending the school.

Regarding the need to create a leadership culture, the OECD recognises that changing perceptions of the work of school directors from a largely administrative to a professional leadership role will require a significant change in the culture of the school system. At present there is considerable teacher autonomy but schools are in effect units of delivery for the highly centralised range of programmes provided for them. It is important to:

- Explore ways to provide greater autonomy for school leaders, reduce the administrative burden imposed by a vast number of centrally directed programmes (PEC and others) and give real scope to exercise pedagogic leadership (of the curriculum, teaching and learning) as well as take managerial decisions.
- Give incentives, support and training to build the capacity and motivation to exercise the school leadership role.

The aim must be to create a culture in which school leadership is valued as the key to school improvement. As Kotter (1996) says, however, the culture is the last element to develop after all the other pieces are in place. Supervisors have an important role in providing leadership and both supporting and challenging the leaders of their schools. They should be able to demonstrate their effect in raising school performance and not simply use their power as administrators.

**RECOMMENDATION 11: Build instructional leadership and teaching capacity within schools and groups of schools, encouraging schools to work together in partnerships or groups**

*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 who 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.*

**Context**

The best conditions for schools to be successful are found where they have a relatively stable, well-qualified group of teachers who work together as a team, together with leadership that provides strategic vision and is focused on the development and well-being of both students and staff. These conditions are exceptional in many schools in Mexico. It is difficult to create a team approach when many teachers work in more than one school, or are part-time and paid by the hour. Some of the challenges of the Mexican school system arise because many schools have limited capacity for self-improvement. This is a consequence of insufficient instructional leadership, the limitations of some teachers, insufficient resources for learning and the relative professional and often geographical isolation of many schools. It is important to strengthen the link between teachers' in-service training courses and school practice. Where good and high quality practice exists, whether in classroom teaching or school leadership, it needs to be shared so that others can learn and students can benefit.

School-based professional development has proven to be an effective way of improving the quality of teaching and effectiveness of learning in other countries, but is very limited in Mexico. There are logistic difficulties because of teachers working in more than one school, school buildings being used for split shift schools and so on. The aim of re-professionalising teachers and school leaders is hard to achieve in these circumstances. New system-wide solutions to this challenge will all make a contribution. These include the examination for new teachers, the accumulation of points which recognise teachers' commitment to in-service training and professional development, and a prospective examination for directors. Such measures are important in moving towards meritocratic pay and promotion systems. But it cannot be assumed that such measures will automatically improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

One difficulty of making school-centred professional development effective is that there may not be sufficient expertise in individual schools to contribute significantly to development sessions. What can be done to improve mathematics, for example, when some of those who teach mathematics are unable to complete the assessments used for PISA level 5<sup>3</sup> (OECD, 2004). Another challenge, experienced by many other countries, is that there may not be enough highly effective school leaders to provide one for every school. It may help to solve both of these problems if schools cooperate in formal or informal groups or partnerships, and share teaching and leadership expertise across schools.

### **Research and international practice**

Many models of inter-school collaboration have been adopted by different administrations in England. Some are more effective than others, as shown by the following examples.

**Beacon schools:** One approach is to identify very effective schools from which others can learn. The intention is that teachers will visit these schools, observe the school's practice, and go and reproduce it in their own school. "Beacon" schools were identified in England and received additional funding to act as hosts to teachers from other schools and disseminate their good practice. Unfortunately, teachers did not find it easy to reproduce in their own school approaches they had seen in another school. The Beacon Schools programme, established in England in 1998, had limited impact for this reason, and the policy was discontinued after five years. A better way is to link such excellent schools with a few other schools so as to build an ongoing relationship.

**Leading Edge schools:** The concept of a "Leading Edge" school reflects a government aspiration to encourage schools in England to innovate collaboratively and share practices that "tackle some of the most intractable barriers to raising standards". The Leading Edge Partnership Programme (LEPP) was launched in 2003 as a successor to the Beacon schools programme. The programme grew to link about 200 Leading Edge schools with about 800 partners. Lead schools received funding for school leaders and other staff to work with other schools, covering the costs of replacement staff in the Leading Edge school. A study of five Leading Edge partnerships (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009) has identified a range of benefits, summarised below. The benefits for professionals from Leading Edge work include:

- Improved professional support, with the majority of teachers reporting the benefits of an extended network of curriculum-relevant assistance, and heads of department finding a means to overcome isolation, particularly when they have been given the task of boosting the results in a low-achieving department;
- Increased opportunities to gain inspiration and pool ideas for practice with colleagues in an informal setting and based on professional dialogue and judgement;
- High quality professional development in the workplace with the opportunity to generate wider professional learning communities among staff, and support and coaching for leaders at a variety of levels;
- The collaborative development of new practice, sharing and refining current good practice, and jointly engaging in research and innovation to develop responsive teaching techniques, resources and/or wider learning opportunities.

These benefits are characteristic of the key elements of commitment, trust, support, professional development and time for collaborative enquiry which research has associated with effective partnership working, summarised as the creation of "collaborative advantage" (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). It is apparent in several countries with "high stakes" school accountability that ineffective (low-achieving) schools, especially those in challenging circumstances, require external support to improve (Harris, Brown and Abbott, 2006). Elmore (2004) summarised the issues as follows.

*"Teachers were generally doing what they knew how to do, rather than doing what was necessary to produce the results they were trying to produce. In the absence of specific guidance [...] they would continue to do what they regarded as 'good teaching'. In order to get different results they would have to learn to do something different they didn't know how to do, and in order to do that they would have to have access to skills and knowledge that would help them to understand and enact those practices in their classroom [...] The systems exhort schools and localities to provide support and professional development for the schools in need of help, but don't actually invest in the infrastructure required to make sure that the help gets to the right schools at the right time with the right technical expertise."*

In Mexico, the main avenue of support is through school supervisors employed by each state. The use of supervisors, advisers or inspectors is common in the administration of education in many countries. While many supervisors have good professional credibility and sound understanding of effective practice, their expertise is often limited to curriculum leadership rather than school leadership, unless they have been successful directors. Since they no longer work from a school, they may also lack the ability to show or demonstrate good practice or draw upon other expertise which resides in good schools. Supervisors nevertheless have potentially an important role in arranging or brokering the kind of school-to-school support that will help in particular cases.

**School partnerships and federations:** In England, schools are held rigorously accountable through their academic results and regular external inspections of their quality and standards. Schools facing difficulties have frequently received informal support from other schools, often brokered by local authority school improvement staff. In the last ten years, the value of inter-school partnerships has been recognised by legislation (Department for Education and Skills, 2004) which has allowed these to become formalised through schools being led and managed jointly as “federations”. Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) describe “a common federation model” which “involves a lead school working to support and improve a partner school or schools”.

In the USA, Sweden and England, other groupings of schools are known as “chains”, in which groups of schools work to the same principles and philosophy. The schools have individual directors, but are led overall by an executive director and governed by a board or council. In Latin America, such chains generally involve private or religious schools.

**School clusters:** School clusters are organised groups of schools serving a locality, which may be a wide geographical area. One exceptional example of the widespread organisation of schools into clusters can be found in Portugal (See Box 4.5). It started with a nationwide programme for closing very small primary schools, many of which were hard to staff, had low standards and had high pupil retention (holding back) rates.

To increase the effectiveness and quality of primary schools, the government determined that, by law, small schools showing higher rates of retention than the national average must be shut down during 2005/06 and “fostering” schools must be identified to receive the pupils from the schools that were closed down. The closure of small schools needs expanding or building other schools to accommodate the displaced students. The government’s objective has been to improve provision for primary-age students by accommodating them in larger “school centres” which provide a range of enhanced provision. The ideal school or centre should provide for a minimum of 150 students at more than one level.

Implementing the school closure policy involved collaboration between the five regional directorates and the 278 municipalities of continental Portugal. The government has the final decision on the construction of new schools. This process is criterion-based, using measures such as numbers of students and schools, geographical factors and demographic indicators. The programme for modifying and enlarging existing schools and creating school “centres” was supported by 400 million Euros from the European Structural Fund (ESF). This allowed municipalities to augment their own capital spending through matched funding from the ESF, which ranges from 50 to 75%.

The feasibility studies produced for the Portuguese Ministry of Education that showed a relationship between school size and student success also found that pupils at schools with low attendance rates and with few resources have much lower educational success. While these results are not surprising, they provide a research-based approach to policy making. The feasibility studies led to protocols to improve school conditions – in terms of the physical environment, learning support materials and information technology – by creating school centres to receive the students formerly taught in small rural schools. As well as traditional classrooms, these centres provide school facilities that include:

- More than one level of education, in order to maximise common infrastructure – the most common example is the integration of first cycle and pre-school establishments in the same or neighbouring spaces, but there can also be integration with other levels of education;
- Common or multi-use areas, such as libraries, computer rooms, canteen, multi-functional areas for meetings/cultural and PE activities, staff room and parents' reception areas;
- Classrooms modernised for computer use and experiments;
- Outside areas with fences and security, covered areas and sports areas, whenever possible.

An international evaluation of the policy for the reorganisation of primary education concluded that “from the evidence received and experience of visits to see at first hand school centres and schools within clusters, we consider the cluster system a highly appropriate, pragmatic and durable solution to the challenge of providing universal, high quality basic education” (Matthews *et al.*, 2008).

#### Box 4.5 School clusters for primary education in Portugal

The main organisational entity for schools in the first cycle is the school cluster. Clusters may provide for two or more levels of education, from kindergarten to secondary education, integrated into one organisation. The structure of the clusters varies, but typically a cluster may consist of one school of the second and third cycle with a number of schools (typically five to ten or more) with first and pre-school cycles. A school cluster is “an organisational unit, with its own administrative and management bodies, made up of pre-school establishments and one or more education cycles, with the following objectives:

- To facilitate a sequential and coordinated path for the pupils covered by compulsory education in the particular geographic area and to facilitate the transition between levels and cycles of teaching;
- To overcome the isolation of establishments and prevent social exclusion; to consolidate the pedagogical capacity of the establishments that are part of it and the rational use of its resources;
- To guarantee the application of a system of autonomy, administration and management in terms of the current legislation.”

Source: Ministry of Education (2008), *Policy Measures Implemented in the First Cycle of Compulsory Education in Portugal: Country Position Report*, Ministry of Education, Portugal.

#### **How to build instructional leadership and teaching capacity within schools and groups of schools, encouraging schools to work together**

Evidence suggests that schools in Mexico generally work as independent units, many of which have only limited capacity to undertake high quality school-based professional development, among other management tasks. Where this is the case, there is much to be gained by schools building partnerships with other schools so as to pool the expertise of their teachers, ATPs and directors. It is possible to undertake effective professional development as well as make better use of human and other resources in partnerships of schools than in schools separately. For this and other reasons we believe that there would be great advantage in examining various ways in which the most talented teachers and leaders in schools can have the greatest effect, not only on their own pupils and colleagues but more widely. Examples of possible strategies could include:

- Identifying a leading teacher in each “core” subject (such as Spanish and mathematics) within the group of schools, and allowing them some time to work with teachers in schools other than their own;



- Local training for teachers from across the group;
- Shared planning and evaluation with the aim of improving teaching;
- Building the allegiance of teachers who work in more than one school to a group or partnership of schools.

Much depends on the size and geographical distribution of schools in the group, the quality of communications across the cluster and the facilities for pupils and staff to travel between schools and centres. Some schools have imaginative programmes in which children periodically visit centre facilities like a swimming pool even though their own school is some distance from the centre.

In Portugal, England and other administrations, it is clear that policy makers recognise the vital importance of effective leadership in making clusters work effectively and efficiently. Portugal has changed the system of appointing school and group (or cluster) directors from election by staff to appointment on merit by the school council. Criteria are based on curriculum vitae, school management experience and the quality of the project plans proposed by applicants for this position.

Some administrations have grouped schools in formal partnerships, with an executive director/director to lead each group cluster and be responsible and accountable for its improvement and performance. All primary schools in Portugal, for example, are grouped. Each of the constituent schools of a group in Portugal is led by a coordinator; and there is one director for the group or “cluster”. In England individual schools are led by a “head of school” or “associate headteacher”. School leaders still have an important role in taking responsibility for the individual schools and assuring the quality of the core education and curriculum enrichment provision on that school site. There is also an opportunity for the governing body of the school, for example school boards, to become group boards of the community. In Mexico, where a large number of schools do not have tenured directors, the identification of “coordinating directors” who take responsibility for two or more such schools deserves serious analysis.

Some states in Mexico are already experimenting with school grouping arrangements. The following example illustrates large clusters of schools in Aguascalientes (Box 4.6), but there is also scope for smaller, more compact clusters or partnerships.

It is most unlikely that one type of infrastructure will be appropriate across the different contexts in which schools in Mexico operate. A broader range of infrastructure is needed – what has been termed “infrastructure of reform”. This infrastructure would include clusters, partnerships federations and other school-to-school collaborations, but it would also include the operation of some schools as special centres of teacher development, special programming, training and consultation as well as the establishment of a National Programme of Leadership that would regulate the supply of existing and needed courses with a formative emphasis for school leaders and supervisors.

This programme could be managed by a working group in cooperation with universities, the UPN and its state units and some *Normales*. This would avoid creating new structures that could eventually be politicised or bureaucratised and would instead take advantage of the “installed capacity”. In the short term, a set of core courses could be installed that every school director should take. In the mid-term, a more flexible model could be installed in which states and schools can use a different combination of strategies to respond to professional development for directors. States should be grouped according to the level of progress of their current experiences of leadership training. The different options of school improvement would then be defined according to the state and schools’ needs. Thinking in these terms would steer educators in Mexico towards a concept of system leadership in which leaders take responsibility for education beyond the boundaries of their own school or organisation. The starting point is to commence building real leadership capacity, in terms defined by the new framework of leadership standards for Mexico.

### Box 4.6 Clustering in Aguascalientes, the creation of school development centres (Centros de Desarrollo Educativo)

Since 1993, the state of Aguascalientes has engaged in an ongoing process of reforms. It started mainly with the re-organisation of its supervisors' geographic areas of work into 22 clusters known as *Zonas de Educación Básica* (ZEB) that cover all the state's territory. Each ZEB is led by a zone coordinator (*Coordinador de Zona*) named by the state's Education Institute. In 2007 zone coordinators had in charge a total of 158 supervisors across the state (for a population of about 1 211 school directors and 10 800 school teachers). This re-organisation of the state's education system allowed, for example, better cohesion between pre-school, primary and lower-secondary education. Following the idea that supervisors have a central role in delivering education services and in supporting schools in their education planning, other actions were taken to support their work. Supervisors received training to create and interpret information useful for evaluating the work of their schools (school project).

Additionally, in each ZEB, a working centre, currently known as CDE, or *Centro de Desarrollo Educativo*, has been created to encourage the professionalisation of the different actors of the state's education system. From these centres, a zone coordinator designated by the Institute of Education of Aguascalientes (IEA, equivalent of a state Education Ministry), leads a team of supervisors of pre-school, primary and lower-secondary education, as well ATPs and administrative support to:

- allow a better pedagogic articulation for the activities carried out by these teams;
- be used as a space for activities of professional development for teachers and school directors;
- facilitate staff from schools affiliated to that CDE to carry out administrative processes without having to do it in the central office of the IEA (Gobierno del Estado de Aguascalientes, 2009).

Supervisors are meant to approach the education authorities in the places where education happens, and to adapt policies to the local context and specific realities and needs of the schools in each of the ZEBs. For this, they also follow the standards established in 1997 at the state level for teachers, school directors and supervisors. Local actors perceive as adequate the decision taken to focus the reform on supervisors, but their professionalisation still needs further development.

Source: Zorrilla, M. (2005), "A diez años de distancia, una mirada crítica a la reforma de la supervisión escolar en Aguascalientes, Mexico", paper presented at the XVIII International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement, ISCEI, Barcelona.

### RECOMMENDATION 12: Enhance school autonomy and encourage innovation

*To professionalise and hold leaders accountable, these 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 the schools' contexts can also have a positive impact on their achievement.*

#### Context

Mexico has one of the lowest levels of autonomy in schools among countries participating in TALIS (OECD, 2009). Under the General Law of Education, the federal government, through the Ministry of Education (SEP), is responsible for all normative and policy-making functions, including formulating study plans and curricula for primary, lower secondary and teacher training education and authorising teaching materials for basic education and teacher training. Some consider that the reorganisation of the education system in 1993 aimed to bring greater democracy, autonomy and self-governance to the Mexican educational structure and process (Socha, 1997) and to transfer the primary responsibility for basic education with the separate states. States

have primary responsibility for key decisions regarding primary school staffing and funding but much of the available funding is attached to many central programmes. The organisation and structure of education, with strong central control, is not very conducive to greater autonomy. The system is not ready to promote large scale autonomy of schools; many directors are not equipped to be autonomous, and the distribution of resources is too uneven. The immediate task is to equip and empower directors to take greater responsibility for the management and performance of their schools and teachers.

In terms of financial resources, as shown in Chapter 2, in Mexico, a very high proportion of school budgets is spent on teachers' salaries, which are not under the control of the school or school directors. Teachers also receive an additional amount to spend on essential materials for their work. The rest of the money for schools is either attached to central programmes for specific use in providing those programmes or is raised by parents and the community. School resources are therefore minimal and quite unevenly distributed. School directors can decide how money allocated to the school is spent, but in many schools there is little money and little flexibility. This is not a situation in which autonomy provides much opportunity.

In terms of human resources, school directors have little autonomy to make decisions. Selection and deployment of teachers in Mexico is in the hands of the state authority and the union. High teacher mobility affects many Mexican schools badly and is bound to disrupt children's progress. For example, changes can happen with little notice and in the middle of the school year. Additionally, although the implementation of the National Teacher Examination for allocating posts has been an important step towards greater quality in education and transparency in the allocation of teaching posts, in practice it can take a longer time to allocate those teachers who passed the test to schools, resulting in long periods when schools are short of teachers (see more details in Recommendations 4 and 5 on Chapter 3).

School leaders are central to establishing a school culture and capacity conducive to better student performance. If they are not involved in recruiting teachers and evaluating teaching, this diminishes their leadership authority. It is difficult to hold school leaders accountable for learning outcomes when they have no say in selecting their staff. In Mexico, the lack of involvement of school directors in deciding which staff are most suitable for their schools not only erodes the capacity of the director to take responsibility for quality and standards in the school but also acts against the attempt to professionalise the role of director.

As we have seen, teacher dismissal is apparently not an option in Mexico, even for gross professional misconduct. Teachers who cannot safely be allowed to work in schools report to an administrative office for the equivalent hours or are assigned to another school. For this and other reasons, the Mexican economy is supporting a pool of inactive teachers while resource levels in schools are very low.

### **Research and international evidence**

Greater school autonomy has become a reality across many OECD countries, with the development of decentralisation across education and the belief that autonomy together with local accountability can respond more efficiently to local needs. Yet autonomous schools need support structures that permit them to be autonomous, because what happens in the schools and the classrooms is affected by the decisions made by school directors, school boards and school district leaders. Restructuring a system can lay the necessary foundation to improve organisational functioning and student learning. It can be key to setting clear objectives for the system, for following up, evaluating and assessing performance and providing support to students, directors, teachers, and schools (Cuban, Usdan and Hale, 2003).

There is no "right" solution for a school infrastructure that works in all countries. Socio-political contexts are important. It is equally important for regional and national governments to recognise when the system they have

is failing to work as it should. This should lead to a search for solutions and is the reason why the OECD steering group is working with key stakeholders to advise on a solution.

In school systems with well developed and prepared school directors, clear norms and regulations for schools and support arrangements to ensure equitable results, a large degree of school autonomy may be a viable solution. But a high degree of self-management may not be a solution for school systems where capacity and leadership are still to be developed.

Providing administrative arrangements that support schools is now a key issue across OECD countries. Political reforms aim to transform the school system by implementing new visions; creating evaluation rubrics for staff, administrators and teachers; bringing effective leadership; balancing the budget; and improving the management infrastructure. While changes to administrative structures may not act directly to transform student achievement and retention, good structures can positively impact on how schools achieve their organisational mission, how teachers teach, and what students learn, but is not the only mechanism for meaningful education reform.

There is a continuing trend towards giving schools, either through their professional staff or school boards, discretion in hiring teachers and to a lesser extent firing them. The rationale for this is that if school leaders and school boards are to be held accountable for how well children achieve, then they should have some role in choosing the teachers who will help them to deliver. Local autonomy over staff appointments is total in countries such as the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Slovak and Czech Republics, the United States, England and Hungary, but school leaders have a very limited role in countries like Turkey, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Germany and Luxembourg.

### ***How to increase school and local autonomy***

At the local level, it is important to be clear where responsibility and accountability lies. One of the principles of effective delegation is to ensure that the resources needed are locally decided and managed by those responsible and accountable for delivery. Normally the centre for delegation of responsibility and resources is the individual school. A greater degree of managerial freedom for the school director should be accompanied by support, advice and monitoring provided by the state. This implies:

1. Providing the training and resources for schools to act. Local management can be a hollow gesture if schools do not have sufficient resources to facilitate local management and decision-making. Resources should be allocated directly to schools instead. A universal formula should be created that allows all schools to have basic access to resources with minimum administrative procedures. There should be a review of whether the payments for educational materials which are currently made to individual teachers should instead go to the school. There needs to be complete clarity about where various responsibilities lie. The resources currently attached to central programmes should be devolved to states, for equitable distribution to schools.
2. Providing a supportive structure within which schools operate. The creation of intermediate-level support and governance arrangements, which lie at the zonal or sub-state level between the state and schools or groups of schools could have many advantages, as seen in the case of Canadian school boards.
3. Encouraging experiments and pilot projects in school autonomy within states, so as to find out what works best, and to generate knowledge and experience.

Although many schools in Mexico are not ready for high levels of autonomy or delegation of responsibilities, there are examples of schools with better resource levels and high quality professional leadership where delegated management could be tried out. Indeed Schmelkes (2001) describes excellent schools with excellent learning outcomes that are “obviously” making their own decisions. She concludes that “a certain and perhaps an increasing degree of school autonomy is undoubtedly advisable”. We also stress that that the know-how and skills of school-based management must also be developed if self-management is to be really effective.

We recommend that questions of greater autonomy, financial delegation and local management are explored through research and pilot projects involving a small number of municipalities, schools and groups of schools, keen to explore the opportunities provided by a greater measure of local determination. An example from Guanajuato is shown below (Box 4.7). The focus should remain strongly on the quality and improvement of pupils' experience, particularly the pace, challenge and enjoyment of their learning. This will be influenced most directly by the quality of teaching and, second only to this, the quality of school and group leadership.

#### Box 4.7 The programme of “self-managing schools” in Guanajuato

The programme of “self-managing schools” (*Escuela Autogestiva*) is among the initiatives introduced in Guanajuato to improve the attainment and quality of its education system. The programme covers public and private institutions and its main objective is to foster the development of the schools' capacities for self-assessment and collective reflection. As part of this strategy of school empowerment, schools are required to develop their own School Education Projects (*Proyecto Educativo Escolar* – PEE). To support them in this task, the Education Ministry of Guanajuato has drawn elements from PEC and PEC-FIDE that provide schools with a new method of developing school improvement plans.

As part of this programme, school directors, supervisors and other staff within the school receive training, follow-up support or tutoring to help them identify and prioritise needs. Teacher and school directors enter information from the PEE into a database called SISPEE (*Sistema del Proyecto Educativo Escolar*). This database provides orientations to prepare their school project (for example, how to draw up objectives and strategies, and decide which goals to establish and what indicators would be useful to this end). Also, because the database contains historical data entered by the school, it is possible to conduct a follow-up analysis of the state of the school in areas such as: the curriculum, pedagogy and the security or health of the students. In order to maximise the information available to schools, the Education Ministry of Guanajuato has also set the goal of concentrating all education databases into one unique source.

Some school directors acknowledged the value of developing the strategic plan for education at the school level into SISPEE. However, they also expressed the need to consider the amount of time involved in carrying out this administrative work.

*Source:* Secretaría de Educación de Guanajuato (2009a), Instructivo para la captura en el SISPEE Ciclo escolar 2009-2010, Subsecretaría para el Desarrollo Educativo, Dirección General de Educación Básica, Coordinación de Gestión Educativa, Guanajuato, México. Secretaría de Educación de Guanajuato (2009b), “Programa de educación básica, reunión con expertos de la OCDE”, PowerPoint Presentation, 21 October 2009, Guanajuato, México.

The challenge moves from government to the profession itself, in collaboration with all stakeholders. Meeting this challenge will be as demanding, but as important, as the reorganisation and policies that have provided the infrastructure for success.

School-based management is certainly a first objective for Mexico to attain, but in the long term its main objective should be establishing an education-based community. Mexico needs to foster innovative approaches to greater autonomy and creative partnerships of schools in territorially compact areas, and reduce the burden of regulations and bureaucracy. States should be in a position to give effective schools greater freedom to innovate. They should also experiment in a real context with models of community-based education management. Thus, the territory could be organised on “action zones”, not unlike school boards in Canada and the USA. These new methods of organisation would also aim to help schools obtain more efficient financing and resource management.

These action zones could be important elements for Mexico, since the school or “*zona escolar*” (as it currently operates) alone cannot make significant changes in accountability or support policies for the schools. It is necessary to enhance leadership capacities based on priority needs of training or support, and to do this within a context that allows community and sub-regional stakeholders to be included where possible. These “action zones” would work as a base to transform the operational logic of schools, promoting education communities that work against the isolation of children and schools.

**RECOMMENDATION 13: Reduce inequities in school funding and rationalise the programmes to achieve a flexible programme that is adaptable to schools’ needs**

*In practice, schools have virtually no autonomy and no funds to allocate, and there is a discrepancy between the resources available to schools in rich and poor communities. Distribution of resources should be more equity-based, avoiding unaffordable bureaucratic burdens for schools.*

**Context**

The level of resources schools receive is low and unequal, and dependant on bureaucratic procedures that hinder the development of good leadership. Mexico is one of many countries, typical of Latin America, in which the general approach to resourcing is that the state pays teachers’ salaries and parents pay for the rest; however, this is an unwritten practice and actually goes against the constitution, which states that basic education is free of charge. In reality, teachers’ pay includes an amount for professional materials and some central programmes adopted by schools are also supported by resources. Parents’ contributions (school funds) are often supported by school shops and administered by parent teacher associations. There is a real discrepancy between the resources available to schools in rich and poor communities, which leads to inequitable educational opportunities. Better resourced schools are also likely to attract and retain better teachers. The main resources that that schools can use for capital improvements as well as books, teaching materials and equipment are derived from three sources:

- Parental contributions and money raised by the school and parents’ associations;
- Money attached to particular education programmes;
- An element added to teachers’ pay that is to be used to purchase materials for the teacher.

In practice, schools have virtually no autonomy and no funds to allocate. A fundamental issue therefore is the distribution of financial resources in the system, which should be based more on needs. The uneven distribution of resources to schools means that schools in low income areas usually have poor public infrastructure and less well qualified teachers. Schools serving poor communities therefore continue the cycle of disadvantage, and the result is a widening of the attainment gap.

The school fund is a combination of school fees, fundraising money and donations. It is the responsibility of school governing bodies to ensure that all these funds are kept and managed in one bank account. No public school should have more than one bank account. Each school governing body must prepare a budget of the estimated income and expenditure of the school for the next financial year and present it at an annual general meeting of parents for their consideration and approval (by a majority of the parents). In addition to the budget, school fees, language of instruction and school uniform are also discussed at the annual general meeting. In one of the Mexican schools we visited, the funds raised by the parents’ association and through the school store were not properly accounted for. It is important that delegation of responsibility for resource management has proper accountability mechanisms.

In addition to individual school funding, much Mexican educational provision is through national programmes, which are structured educational interventions to which a budget is usually attached, although this is in

different proportions and some of them operate without any funds at all. There can be as many as 120 of these programmes, which may come from the federal level or may have been created at the state level.

The Schools of Quality programme (*Programa de Escuelas de Calidad*, PEC) has become one of the main funding programmes for schools, but there are many of them, such as *Escuela segura*, *Escuela de tiempo completo*, which schools may opt for to receive funding for their specific school arrangements. It is a major part of the work of school directors to bid for and manage the programmes relevant to the school. This involves demanding administrative processes, which, directors claim, limit their capacity to engage in instructional leadership. From interviews, the Steering Group learned that school programmes reach about 50% of the total schools in Mexico, with the rest not being able or deciding not to opt for specific additional funding beyond that being raised through their own means. Often, it is the most disadvantaged schools that are not able to opt for programme funding, because of lack of capacity and because the burden in administrative accountability for the programmes is too high.

In some areas, there are efforts to increase the coherence of responses to schools' needs and development plans, based on the careful analysis and design of regional transversal responses. An example is the development of the *Centros de Desarrollo Educativo* in Aguascalientes. For schools in the most vulnerable contexts, regional overarching responses have been articulated under a single "diagnosis and implementation" plan called the Integrated Plan for Attention to the Vulnerable Population (*Plan Integral de Atención a Población Vulnerable*). For schools participating in this plan, the state and the federations coordinate the different components of the programmes and align those that are similar. Also, to respond effectively to schools in particularly violent contexts, SEP and local authorities are exploring different options to coordinate education structures and services in Ciudad Juarez (for example, the plan "We are all Juarez: the case of Juarez City" or *Todos somos Juarez: el caso de Ciudad Juarez*), in order to simplify decision-making and respond to the needs of schools, families, students and teachers. This zone may become an "exception zone", in which significant bureaucratic steps are simplified.

The Steering Group was not able to investigate the full range of provision of school resources but considers that two matters are of particular importance. The first is the need to improve the equity of school funding and the second is the need to ensure that all schools have a clear funding structure that allows for the best delivery of education.

### **Research and international evidence**

The Steering Group is aware of other countries that have made progress in overcoming inequities in school provision. The usual way is to take account of social disadvantage in their mechanisms or formulae for allocating funding so that schools serving the most disadvantaged areas receive proportionally more money per student.

The main principle of funding in Hungary and many other countries is the normative one: a set amount of funding is allocated per student. This varies according to school type, but not between the different actors supporting the financing of schools (these include local government and non-state supporters, such as churches, foundations, public beneficiary or economic organisations) (OECD, 2007). In addition to normative funding, the central budget also provides "targeted and addressed grants" for specific school educational purposes. These sources are allocated to the Ministries concerned and then channelled both to maintainers and to education providers/educational institutions. Over the last few years, programmes for the development of small community schooling, classroom and gym building projects, educational competitions, textbook publishing and in-service training have all been funded through such targeted grants.

As explained in the paragraphs above, responses already taken by Mexico show that there is indeed a need to rationalise programmes, and that there are currently measures such as the development of "exception

zones" that will allow schools and the school system to respond to their challenges through a simpler and more practical approach, by reducing bureaucratic burdens and optimising synergies between programmes to address schools' needs.

***How to reduce inequities in school funding and rationalise the programmes to achieve a flexible programme that is adaptable to schools' needs***

There is a need to improve both the amount of funding for Mexico's schools and the equity of its distribution. Two steps that would increase equity are:

- Revise state funding formulas so that schools serving the most disadvantaged areas receive proportionally more money per student.
- Replace the array of special programmes, each with their own requirements and application process, with a single, flexible improvement grant that all schools would receive and that could be shaped to respond to school needs and priorities. This grant should be administered by the state, which becomes the body that commissions education from schools. Many of the smallest and poorest schools receive no funding under the current programmes because they do not have the administrative capacity to complete the application process or handle the reporting requirements.

There are different solutions to the need to rationalise programmes and simplify school funding, and it appears that SEP has already started exploring possibilities. It is desirable to reduce and simplify the many programmes, either to a single funding stream or to groups of programmes that are needed for different types of school. Examples of three alternative approaches are given below.

One option might be to continue with the development of new programmes, allowing schools to opt for those that are most suitable for them, and providing them with intermediary support and guidance to help them choose and follow through on the administrative issues. In the short term, staff teams could be trained to guide and support schools (mainly those that do not have access to the programmes) to help them gain access to these programmes. This could be at federal and state level. However, although this would help bring together the relevant teams and resources, it would not reduce the bureaucracy involved in designing and managing the programmes at state level.

A second option would be to rationalise and simplify the programmes to one or two that are flexible enough for schools to be able to choose their specific focus. This can be done successfully when the leadership and school management is well prepared and has the right support to make the choices and take all the managerial decisions required to manage the school. The PEC has already laid the ground work for one programme that aims to achieve greater school autonomy and more involvement of parents and school councils. Evaluations of this programme have been positive overall, although they have identified some deficiencies at the operational level and limitations in the attainment of objectives. For example, schools still deal with a great amount of bureaucratic burdens, and capacity building for better instructional leadership does not always take place. In this important step, supervisors also still need to assure themselves as pedagogic allies of the school director. It would be convenient to refine the methodology and objectives of the PEC programme so that this can effectively serve as an example of how to develop a simple programme that reaches all schools.

A third option would be to work towards the objective of linking funding to the number and ages of pupils rather than programmes, while providing safeguards for small and challenging schools. This has the greatest potential to begin to reduce economic inequities in the provision of education.



**RECOMMENDATION 14: Strengthen social participation by giving school councils greater responsibilities in relation to the school and the school greater responsibilities in relation to the community**

*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, information, training and transparency.*

**Context**

Mexico has adopted a policy that requires every school to set up a council for social participation to enhance engagement with parents and the community and ensure accountability. School councils and engagement with parents and society can help raise awareness of the value of education in the communities in which schools are embedded. But to function well and exercise their tasks they need some influence over the things that matter: the selection of school staff; resources and how they are acquired and used; the curriculum and other school organisation arrangements.

**Social participation councils** were formally created at the national, state, local government and school levels as part of the education reforms that took place during 1992 and 1993. These bodies bring together parents and their associations, teachers, education authorities, the union, as well as community representatives that are closely involved in education matters. Their main role is to provide support for education activities, to become familiar with and offer opinions on pedagogic issues, plans, programmes and sector evaluations, and to propose policies to improve quality and attainment in education (Articles 69-72, SEP, 1993). Additionally, social participation councils at schools (CEPS) participating in PEC are required to produce an annual working plan and a strategic plan for school transformation in five-year cycles. It is expected that about 50 000 schools have these plans in place by 2012.

To date, it appears that the mandate has been fulfilled only to a limited extent, and quite unevenly. The social participation council at the national level (*Consejo Nacional de Participación Social – CONAPASE*) was not installed until 1999, and even then it was not properly operational. Efforts began in 2009 to reactivate it as part of the *Alianza's* efforts. Social participation councils at the state and local government levels do not seem to have progressed significantly as participation catalysers among stakeholders, and their activities seem more focused on operative aspects.

Also, at the **school level**, only 44% (88 000 out of 200 000) of the social participation councils have been installed until now in public schools. From these, as the President of Mexico pointed out, “many are not really effective”. Where they exist, the councils have little real influence on the school. They can provide a community voice, but are not involved in important decisions, for example those concerning the leadership and staffing of the school. The Steering Group interviewed a range of participants in education – federal government officials, supervisors, directors, teachers and parents, as well as representatives of civil society – and got a rich picture of councils for social participation as an important but under-developed and weak mechanism for improving education quality and social involvement.

School directors express mixed views of the current and long-term benefits of the councils for social participation. On the whole, they seem to think the councils are a good idea in principle and over the long run, but that they are ineffective and difficult to work with in the short run. One director who seemed typical of many others told the Steering Group that he faced a lot of turbulence in trying to introduce a new curriculum, manage without a janitor and deal with a rapidly growing population. He said that he was trying to involve the parents and the social participation council, but their ability to help was limited because many parents did not know how to be helpful. Some tried, but others seemed only to want to criticise the teachers. This director also stated that

he did not know how to work effectively with the council. This is a role that takes training and experience. Another director said he found that working to convince parents to help on the social participation councils and helping them understand pedagogical content was almost worse than the administrative overload he had earlier complained of.

Teachers' views also varied widely. Many teachers the Steering Group talked with stated that they found parents uninvolved and uninterested. They seemed to find the councils removed from their school work, stating that the council provided no real support for pedagogy. On the other hand, teachers did note that the director and the council were helpful in organising the school to use the "netbooks" donated by Telmex. In one school visited, the parents' association was a more concrete presence in the teachers' lives than the council. The parents and teachers met at the start of the year. Teachers told parents how much money they would need to buy supplies and materials over the year, and the parents determined upon an amount they would contribute. Parents raise this money through donations and running a "school store", a shop by the school gate that sells drinks and snacks and donates profits to the school. It should be noted that parent association committees are elected, but members of school councils are mainly designated.

Parents interviewed at one school reported that the council was not an effective means of communication. At another school, however, the parents' association and the social participation council appeared to work together well. This seemed to be a higher socio-economic status (SES) school with well educated, involved parents. When this school participated in the PEC, funds were available for the council's operation. These funds are not available now as the school can no longer participate in PEC. The council relies on the parents' association for the funds it needs. This parents' association appeared to be closely involved in checking student performance data (at least of the parents' own children), in meeting periodically with the teachers to discuss the school plan, and in educating the parent community to enhance their engagement with the school. The association and the council in this school seemed to have arrived at a division of labour that capitalised on the strengths of each.

In another interview session, educators said that social participation councils could be helpful in exercising accountability over the school and system performance. There is, however, the possibility that this role creates conflict between teachers and parents and community. Nevertheless, interviewees argued that the councils need to grow strong so they can apply public pressure for improved education.

In June 2010, the federal government presented the new *General Operation Guidelines for the School Councils of Social Participation*. These guidelines correspond to an effort by the federal government to strengthen the social participation mechanisms at the different levels of the education system. As part of the main tasks that can be drawn from the guidelines, the school councils (CEPS) will be expected to:

- Ensure transparency in the use of resources obtained from federal or state programmes, or accumulated by the schools themselves;
- Review the results obtained in regular evaluations (for example ENLACE) and encourage teachers and school directors to establish goals to improve the results of future evaluations;
- Create different "thematic committees" within the school council. These "thematic committees" will be in charge of helping the school gain access to the resources provided by the variety of federal or states' programmes (for example reading, improvement of physical structures, artistic or cultural activities, among others).

The government aims to have a council installed in every school (200 000) by 2010. This goal involves the creation or re-activation of at least 112 000 school councils in schools where these did not exist before, or were not properly functional.

It may be too soon to assess the success of the school councils. The policy is being implemented on a national scale, seemingly without previous experience at local levels. One question that arises is whether the aim of implementing these councils in all schools is viable, given that some schools are very small and isolated (see Box 2.2 in Chapter 2). Another issue to consider is whether the creation of additional entities within the school council (“thematic committees”) will result in increased bureaucracy for the school if it is not handled appropriately. Nevertheless, in schools where these councils work well, they can increase accountability by involving parents and the school community in the life of the school.

### **Research and international evidence**

Overall, councils or boards seem to be most effective when they have a substantive role to play and when they are well equipped to play that role. Glatter (2003) proposed, as shown in Box 4.8, four models of governance of which three, in the right proportions, apply to the governance of schools in countries like Mexico.

#### **Box 4.8 Models of school governance**

- **Institutional empowerment** – stakeholders in individual institutions are empowered to make decisions; the focus is more on the institution itself and the way it is run than on its competitive or comparative success.
- **Local empowerment** – control and responsibility are devolved to the locality as a social and educational unit, specifically to local and municipal authorities and to groups of families of educational institutions.
- **Quality control** – educational institutions are conceived as the point of delivery. Higher authorities at national or regional level lay down rules and establish targets, evaluation and monitoring arrangements, with the aim of ensuring that education is effectively delivered.

*Source:* After Glatter as depicted by Woods, P. (2005), “Learning and the External Environment” in *Leadership and Management in Education: Cultures, Change and Context*, eds. M. Coleman and P. Earley, Oxford University Press, England.

### *School governance and social participation*

Levels of social participation in school governance vary considerably across the range of OECD member countries. In general, there is a dynamic tension between the responsibilities of different entities from national to local level, in which the boundaries of administrative control, responsibility and accountability shift slightly with each new regulation issued.

Three inter-connected factors appear to determine the degree to which the affairs of public schools are influenced or controlled by their local communities: democratic evolution, politics and ideology. Strong central control is reflected in many European systems which have roots in imperial or monarchic administrations. France, Spain and Portugal remain examples of this tradition. The teachers in these countries are part of the civil service, as distinct from Mexico, the UK and many other administrations where teachers are public but not civil servants. The central direction of education in Mexico was described to the Steering Group as being strongly influenced by Napoleonic administrative systems, although the 32 states have considerable administrative autonomy. Decentralisation of responsibility from federal to state level is almost total in the federal countries of Germany and Canada, although for very different reasons. The German federal system evolved as a reaction to the disastrous consequences of too much power being held and abused by the centre under the fascist regime. In Canada, one of the most democratic of nations, education

is the exclusive responsibility of each of the ten provinces and three territories, which can make laws in relation to education. There is no federal education system.

It is relevant that both Germany and Canada, despite their devolution of power to constituent states, have recognised the need to create forums at which issues of national interest can be discussed and developed. In Canada, for example, the national voice for education is the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), established in 1967. This is the mechanism through which Ministers consult and act on matters of mutual interest. This ensures communication on issues such as funding programmes and student assessment. From time to time, CMEC undertakes national projects in curriculum and assessment and makes statements on its aims and responsibilities. Only recently has CMEC taken a more active stance toward influencing education through developing nationwide standardised tests and looking for ways to facilitate the mobility of students between provinces. Similar systems, where statutory responsibility for education is devolved to constituent states, apply in Germany, and to a lesser extent in Australia, both of which have national forums in which to share common issues.

In England, although there is a strong national regulatory framework for education, schools and their governing bodies have a high degree of local autonomy. As a result, the local authorities which comprise the middle tier have a reduced role in terms of policy direction. The 153 local authorities have less direct responsibility for schools than before and do not make education policy. They are expected to represent their constituents by acting as commissioners of education and other services for children and young people, with schools being the providers. New Zealand has taken simplification further. It cut out the “middle-man” by abolishing local education authorities in the early 1990s. There is a direct relationship between schools and the Minister of Education to whom they are accountable. In Canada it is regional, not national, government that legislates for education and is the only source of policies for schools. School boards then provide local interpretation and contextualisation.

#### *Social participation: municipality level*

The long-established models of social participation are represented by European models of education in which local people are represented in the delivery of education by their local authorities. Hungary is an example of such a system. Overall responsibility for education at the national level is shared by several entities in addition to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of the Interior looks after the allocation of state grants in the form of normative financing to local authorities and the Ministry of Finance also plays an important indirect role. At school level, structural decisions are made by the local (municipal or county) authority that maintains schools. There are more than 3 000 local authorities, which are responsible for providing basic education services for the local population, either by maintaining a school or by creating access to institutions maintained by other authorities, and more than 95% of primary and secondary schools are owned and run by local authorities. Local authorities are responsible for:

- Deciding on the establishment, organisation, reorganisation or closure of schools and defining their profile;
- Defining schools’ budgets;
- Supervising schools financially and legally;
- Appointing the director of the school;
- Approving the pedagogical (teaching) programme and the operational and organisational rules of schools;
- Evaluating the implementation of the (teaching) programme and the efficiency of teaching in schools;
- Social participation: area school board level.

In Canada, education is the exclusive responsibility of each of the ten provinces and three territories, which can make laws in relation to education. Thus there is no federal education system. Historically, each province

is organised around locally elected school boards, whose board of trustees is responsible for appointing the chief superintendent, and for hiring directors and teachers to run the schools within their jurisdiction. The school board is the employer of administrators and teachers and is funded by a combination of local taxes and provincial revenues. Education and curriculum policy is formulated at the provincial level and interpreted and implemented at the local level, within varying degrees of autonomy depending on the area and the province in question (See Box 4.9, with school boards in British Columbia).

#### *Box 4.9* Professional school boards in British Columbia, Canada

The Ministry of Education is responsible for ensuring that students enrolled in elementary schools and high schools have access to good quality, cost-effective education. The Ministry sets the standards and overall direction for the education system and provides leadership to education agencies in the province. The Ministry's key responsibilities are finance and facilities; programme (curriculum) direction; development and implementation; student access and achievement; and system evaluation and public accountability.

British Columbia's public education system is administered by around 60 locally elected school board districts, which operate under the guidelines of the School Act and regulations and ministerial orders. Over half a million students are taught in more than 1 600 public schools in the province. The province also funds around 330 independent/private schools and several special schools. Boards of trustees are elected for each public school district and are responsible for setting spending priorities in their district. Boards hire staff, deliver programmes and services and maintain buildings.

Education in Italy has traditionally been centrally administered (Box 4.10). However, since the end of the 1950s, responsibilities and services have gradually been decentralised; in 1972 many of the state's administrative powers over education were transferred to the local authorities – regions, provinces and communes. Education policy, however, remains centralised, and all schools – state, non-state public (for example, run by cities and communes) or private – must conform to national laws and decrees and regulations if they wish to be legally authorised. Teachers are also centrally recruited and paid directly by the state (although they are allocated to schools by the local authority). The two lower levels of Italy's multi-layered management of education are communes and school boards.

#### *The impact of school boards, councils or governing bodies on school effectiveness*

In the United States, a number of studies have identified several characteristics associated with effective school boards: focusing on student achievement and policy; effective management; development of conditions and structures that allow the director to manage; agreement on processes to evaluate the director; communication, trust and collaborative relationships with the director and between board members; communication with outside groups and government; effective performance in policy making and financial management; evaluation and training; regular board meetings and long-term service of board members and heads (National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants, 2005). In Australia, studies have also reported similar characteristics considered to be essential for effective governance in Australian independent schools.

A study of English governance practices found that there are a number of ways in which governors can make a difference in schools. An evaluation of the performance of governing bodies in school improvement by the Office for Standards in Education (2001) focused on schools "in special measures" (those deemed to need action for serious weaknesses) and on how governing bodies had contributed to improving their performance. While they found many problems that had made governing bodies ineffective and also part of the problem of

### Box 4.10 School councils in selected countries

Participation councils in the **Netherlands**: All schools also have a participation council, in which parents can make known their views about the school's policies. Most also have a parents' council or a parents' committee. There is a school plan. This provides an insight into the teaching and developmental objectives of the school, the choice of subject matter and teaching methods, the organisation of the school and the way in which students' progress is assessed and reported. The school plan is submitted to the Education Inspectorate for its approval.

School councils in **Italy**: Within schools, the school council is responsible for budgetary matters and for organising and planning non-educational school activities. Within the limits of the budget and law, it deliberates on the purchase, renewal and maintenance of school equipment and teaching materials and decides on the use of premises and equipment, on extracurricular and sports activities, on remedial and support courses and on cooperation with other schools. The school council is made up of representatives elected by teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and, in upper secondary schools, students. The director or headteacher is an ex-officio member. A chairman is elected from parents' representatives. The school council also elects its own executive board, chaired by the director or headteacher.

Municipal school councils in **Spain** (*Consejos Escolares Municipales*) are the local social participation bodies. They report on educational matters within their powers to education authorities at central and autonomous community level. Municipal authorities are represented on the school councils of autonomous communities and the school councils of (individual) education establishments. Parents are also represented on these councils.

Legislation has devolved responsibilities to the governing and educational coordination bodies. In publicly-funded schools, responsibility for administrative and financial management lies either with individuals (*unipersonales*) or with collegiate bodies (*colegiados*). "Individuals" include a headteacher, a secretary and a head of studies (*Jefe de Estudios*), and "collegiate bodies" include a school council (*Consejo Escolar*) and a teachers' assembly (*Claustro de Profesores*). The school council comprises representatives of the teaching staff, parents, students and so on. Its responsibilities include electing the headteacher, school discipline, student admission and financial management.

failing schools, they found positive features that had contributed to turning around schools' results. Particularly, governors can make a difference when they are clear about the school's objectives and values; when the governing body has clear references and is clear about its role; when governors have a wide range of expertise and experience and attend meetings regularly; when meetings are run efficiently; when there is a clear school plan for school improvement, understood by all; when there are good relationships between governors and staff; when there is a rigorous system for monitoring and evaluating school performance; and when governors' training is linked to school priorities and the needs of governors.

Several characteristics are known to interfere with effective functioning of external governing or advisory bodies:

- Not enough candidates for board positions;
- A lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities of boards;
- Too many responsibilities involved for a volunteer position;
- Tensions that may exist between boards and directors;
- Limited participation and engagement of members.

### ***How to strengthen social participation by giving school councils greater responsibilities in relation to the school and the school greater responsibilities in relation to the community***

In Mexico, school councils can play an important role at different levels. On one hand, they can contribute to raising awareness of the value of education in parents and in the communities in which the schools are embedded. They can also challenge and support the school and hold it accountable. This requires capable and committed members, whose contribution is supported by training and other means.

These ideals will only come about if the barriers to greater social participation are lowered. Creating the school councils by itself will not result in effective social partnerships. Parents and community members have no tradition of involvement of this sort, nor do they have the training needed to play the role effectively. There is no tradition that the school belongs to them and that they can demand quality; instead, there is a tradition of central authority and exclusion.

To be successful, social participation must be authentic participation. School councils need real power or influence over things that matter: the selection of school staff; resources and how they are acquired and used; the curriculum and school organisation arrangements. Councils need information, data and transparency in their working.

Moreover, the effectiveness of social participation is a function of the latitude there is for discretion at the school level. For example, if directors are selected through a merit process that takes place outside the school, participation will not have much meaning. The same goes for other conditions of schooling, budgeting and policy.

In Mexico, the General Law of Education (*Ley General de Educación*) July 1993 opens the way to a council of secretaries of education; it states in Article 17: "The educational authorities, federal and local, will meet periodically with the purpose of discussing and exchanging views on the development of the national education system, make recommendations and agree action to support the social function of education" (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993). Consequently, the CONAEDU (*Consejo Nacional de Autoridades Educativas*) was created by at initiative of the SEP on 4 March 2004 as an organ to support the governance of the educational system. It is composed by the secretaries of education from each state and by the educational authorities of the federal government.

Analysis of the infrastructure of education systems raises the question of where the locus of responsibility for education should lie. Most OECD countries have three layers of responsibility for schools: national, regional and local, although in many cases, only two of these layers are needed. Expressed most simply, this would amount to "national policy locally interpreted". Viewed from the school's perspective, only one extraneous coherent policy framework is needed. It is for the different layers of government, working in partnership, to present a policy framework within which schools can operate. There is evidence in administrations as different as England and Mexico that too much central direction can lead to initiative overload. In Mexico, this is represented by the large number of programmes (PEC) determined centrally by the federal or state governments, which carry their associated funding arrangements. School directors report that the heavy burden of administration which results from these arrangements reduces their capacity for exercising leadership functions.

Many of those we spoke to in Mexico saw a range of benefits that could result from councils for social participation. These councils could strengthen citizen involvement and government responsiveness; promote greater accountability and quality at the school level; bring a greater variety of points of view and resources to bear on the schools' operation; and create a better-informed and more engaged citizenry. Strong local social participation can also be an effective tool in supporting directors and supervisors and in reinforcing their local autonomy.

One element of the training and development of local school councils for social participation can be provided by the school. That is, the school should be obliged to report regularly on such important activities and outcomes

as attendance, student achievement and professional development for teachers. Schools can also advise parents on how best to support their children's education, and the particular school programme, at home. But training must go beyond this. The councils need to have an independent base of training and information as well. One interviewee suggested aspects which we believe could readily be incorporated into any programme of training and capacity-building for councils:

- Linking with strategic programmes and in particular the quality schools programme;
- Finding ways of demonstrating good practice and helping parents understand benchmark practices against which to compare their school;
- Training in conflict resolution.

These suggestions provide a good starting place. School councils need clear information and data to inform them about the quality and standards of the school. Examples include:

- Provision of meaningful information about student achievement that can be measured against other similar schools;
- Accurate information about teacher attendance and timeliness;
- A periodic evaluative report by the director.

It is important to remember that councils will consist of different and unequal members, where, most often, business leaders will be stronger and better informed than some parents. The councils will need training in working together and group process.

The Steering Group heard about promising instances of community development and social participation during its visit. The quality programme in one school was reported to include a programme of communication and collaboration with the parents. This was a leadership education project that entailed collaboration at three levels: teachers, leaders and community. The community dimension was intended to "open the doors" to the community, help them learn about the school, improve their ability to communicate and collaborate and create a sense of belonging. The focus was to shift from a model where the school "informed" the community to one where school and community engaged in "construction together". It was emphasised using the community's existing resources and networks and avoiding the alienation that comes from imposing something on the community "from above".

There is apparently a large discrepancy between what has been mandated by law, the participation of school councils in each school, and the current reality. Moreover, there are evidently far fewer councils in operation that there are reported to be. This discrepancy creates public distrust. There is little information or accountability for the funding that has been spent on councils, and there is conflict with the union over how the president or chair of the school council is to be put in place and over composition of the council. The law says the president should be elected, but the union wants the director to be the president. The Steering Groups's view is that this would be counterproductive to social participation. The director must play a collaborative role, but the powers of school and council must be kept separate. The union also wants all council members to be elected rather than to ensure that 50% plus one of the members are parents. Parents, we understand, tend not to be recognised as peers on councils. If they are to have a reasonable voice, they probably need a majority, at least in the early years of establishing the traditions of social participation and parental capacity to participate.

Ideally, social participation can be seen as the capacity of the local unit to function autonomously and create its own quality processes, rather than await the actions of a higher authority. There are many school councils in operation but there is not much readily accessible information about where they are, how many there are, what they are doing and with what effect. More communication and better systems for collecting, organising



and sharing information are needed.

It is important not to regard community and parental involvement as a one-way street – that is, what community and parents can do to contribute to and support the work of the school and the efforts of their children to succeed. This responsibility of parents and the community is demonstrably important, but it is not the whole story. Scholar-practitioners like James Comer at Yale, among others, point out the responsibility of the school to reach out to the parents and community. They note that the most effective form of public involvement is a two-way interaction in which both school and community undergo a mutual cultural change. The values and behaviours of parents and the community need to change to become more fully supportive of school and student, but the school too needs to change its values and practices in order fully to engage with the parents and community.

One way to conceive of social participation is through the three main stakeholder groups acting on behalf of children and young people – like a three-legged stool. They are: the central government, the union and the general population. Each plays a key role in the Mexican system of education; and each must develop and adapt to the new challenges and demands on education in Mexico.

- The central government will maintain its central role in education policy, but it must make progress in completing the devolution of governance to the states and schools and it must embrace the new role of building national capacity for school improvement.
- The union will continue to serve as a major social partner and representative of labour interests, but it too must adapt by playing a more professional and cooperative role in fostering reform. The *Alianza* partnership is a fine beginning; the full implications of the *Alianza* programme for the union's emerging role in promoting reform must be realised.
- Finally, social participation is a strong public value but it has been undernourished. This value must be given greater weight, equal length and load-bearing capacity to the other legs of the policy stool. School councils must be given substantive and viable duties and influence along with commensurate training and resources.

Social participation can happen not only at the school level but at zone, state, and national government levels too. States now have authority over curriculum and over choice of conducting school inspections, for example. The state is a good policy intervention point for social participation. Social participation is taking place at the national level through the UPEPE (Unit for Policy Planning in Education). Reform is taking place within a context of long-established traditions and institutional power. Public opinion is necessary to put pressure on change. Social participation is an element in building effective, informed public opinion. It is also possible that stronger and more constant social participation at the school level would contribute continuity to counterbalance the change and lack of continuity some observers attribute to the change of administration every six years.

## CONCLUSION

The quality of school leadership and management is key in raising the attainment of students. But instructional leadership 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.

Schools in Mexico can be improved to provide adequate learning and teaching environments for students and teachers. This requires targeting a set of challenges related to the leadership and management of schools that include the need to focus on improving school performance by building a leadership profession, to reduce inequities between schools serving richer and poorer communities, to simplify funding arrangements, and to provide greater accountability and responsiveness to the community.

### ***Develop standards for school leadership and management focused on improving school outcomes***

School directors in Mexico perform their tasks within an improvised structure that does not provide them with the required preparation, development opportunities and support for their schools. A clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of school leaders is needed to ensure a common understanding of what it means to be a school leader. It should be based on the roles that have the greatest impact on the quality of teaching and learning, focused on supporting, evaluating and working with teachers in doing their job and challenging underperformance. It should take into consideration how much autonomy they have to make decisions and adopt a strategic vision of how the Mexican school system should evolve.

The process of defining a set of standards for directors involves different stages. First, it is important that Mexico reach a shared perspective on what is the core purpose of a director. Next, this core purpose needs to be translated into core areas of competence, and then be made into clear actionable statements for directors. There has been some work on developing standards for school directors and completion of this work should be an urgent, short-term objective. The key is to agree on – at least – a preliminary leadership framework quickly, put it in place and accompany it with feedback mechanisms. These will help to gradually adapt the framework through its socialisation, so that it corresponds to the schools' and teachers' needs and creates consensus.

### ***Professionalise the training, selection and recruitment of school leaders***

The standards will provide an important guide to building leadership capacity. This means defining school leadership as distinct from management or administration, identifying teachers with leadership potential, providing leadership opportunities, training leaders and ensuring that the teachers who become directors have demonstrated their leadership knowledge and competence. Mexico also needs to decide where to invest more: in initial director training or in continuing training of its current school directors.

Leadership development needs to be seen as a continuum: 1) encouraging leadership initial training; 2) organising induction programmes; and 3) ensuring in-service training to cover needs and context. School leadership development and training programmes usually involve both *on-the-job* – with a mentor – and *off-the-job* training to share good practice and technical support. A key issue is to ensure funding for training for directors that can be recognised as part of their professional development in the teacher career ladder (*Carrera Magisterial*) or the teacher progression programme (*Escalafón*). The objectives should be to ensure coherence of provision by different institutions, as well as appropriate variety and the highest possible quality and relevance of the training options.

Appointments for directors should, where possible, be made from a shortlist of candidates, all of whom are qualified in terms of meeting the standards for school leadership. There should be objective procedures to find suitable candidates, which take account of tests, portfolios and their track record. It should be the responsibility of the states to ensure that each school is led by a properly qualified and trained director. Where there is a vacancy, they should convene an appointment panel. It is desirable that the school community is involved in choosing the director, possibly through representatives of parents or the school council. The appointment panel has the job of deciding which candidate will be best for the school and its needs.

### ***Bring schools to work and learn together to build instructional leadership and teaching capacity***

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 who have limited capacity for self-improvement. There is much to be gained by schools building partnerships with other schools so as to pool the expertise of their teachers, ATPs and directors.

Examples of ways in which the most talented teachers and leaders in schools can have the greatest effect include: identifying a leading teacher in each “core” subject, and allowing them some time to work with teachers in other schools; collective local training for teachers; shared planning and evaluation with the aim of improving teaching; or grouping schools in formal partnerships, with an executive director to lead each group cluster and be responsible and accountable for its improvement and performance.

The creation of clusters, partnerships and other forms of school-to-school collaboration is needed. This broader range of infrastructure – known as the “infrastructure of reform” – can also include the operation of some schools as special centres of teacher development, training and consultation. Establishing a National Programme of Leadership could contribute to regulating the supply of courses for school leaders and supervisors. This programme could be managed by a working group in cooperation with universities, the National Pedagogic University (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, UPN) and its state units and some *Normales*, to avoid creating new structures.

### ***Enhance school autonomy and encourage innovation***

Directors need to be given the opportunity to exercise their leadership skills and to participate in the key decisions that take place at their school, such as hiring or dismissing teachers. If the degree of autonomy in a school is low and directors cannot participate in the key decisions that affect them, it will be difficult to render them accountable or to support their professional development. Decision structures that are adapted to the schools’ contexts can have a positive impact on their achievement. However, gradual steps towards greater autonomy should be aligned with strategies for capacity-building in schools, according to their specific contexts.

At the local level, it is important to be clear where responsibility and accountability lies. Normally the centre for delegation of responsibility and resources is the individual school, and this implies providing the training and resources for the school to act accordingly. Resources should be allocated directly to schools, along with a greater degree of managerial freedom for the school director. This should be accompanied by sufficient support, advice and monitoring provided by the state and a supportive structure within which schools operate (such as intermediate-level support and governance arrangements), which would lie at a level between the state and schools or groups of schools.

Greater autonomy, financial delegation and local management can be explored through research and pilot projects involving a small number of municipalities, schools and groups of schools. Innovative approaches can explore creative partnerships of schools and reductions of the burden of regulations and bureaucracy. States should experiment in real contexts with models of community-based education management to help schools obtain more efficient financing and resource management.

### ***Reduce inequities in school funding and establish more effective responses to schools’ needs***

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. It is desirable to reduce and simplify the many programmes, either to a single funding stream or, in the shorter term, to groups of programmes that are needed for different types of school. Among the solutions to explore are:

- To continue with the development of new programmes, allowing schools to opt for those that are most suitable for them, and providing them with intermediary support and guidance to help them choose and follow through on the administrative issues.
- To rationalise and simplify the programmes to one or two that are flexible enough for schools to be able to choose their specific focus. This can be done successfully when the leadership and school management is well

prepared and has the right support to make the choices and take all the managerial decisions required to manage the school. The Schools of Quality Programme (PEC) has already laid the ground work for one programme that aims to achieve greater school autonomy and more involvement of parents and school councils.

- To work towards the objective of linking funding to the number and ages of pupils rather than programmes, while providing safeguards for small and challenging schools. This has the greatest potential to begin to reduce economic inequities in the provision of education.

### ***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. Social participation can be a key instrument to help school directors, through effective mechanisms of distributive leadership. A well prepared and advised school council can significantly help the school director to articulate more effectively what happens in the classroom, the school and the community. Most importantly, school councils need to have real power over things that matter, such as the selection of school staff (and the school director as well), resources, curriculum and school organisation arrangements. To improve social participation, Mexico first needs to strengthen its participative culture and training for this.

Other elements that will be needed are information, data and transparency in their working. The benefits of effective social participation go beyond the school itself. School councils can turn out to be effective “schools of citizenship”, promoting more informed and prepared citizens. This learning of democracy and accountability in school practices could also be useful to develop further engagement in finding solutions to systemic challenges faced at the community, state and national levels.

Chapter 5 offers some guidance for Mexico on how to implement these recommendations together with those proposed in Chapter 3. Establishing priorities and strategies for change will then be key to Mexico’s education improvement in the coming years.

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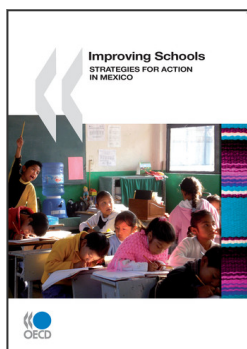
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## NOTES

1. This system also includes upper secondary education teachers (*Carrera Magisterial* only applies for basic education teachers). Evaluations of performance in this system are based on four factors: knowledge, skills, time in service, field of specialisation and punctuality. Guevara and González (2004) reported to the OECD that unlike *Carrera*, which applies exams to evaluate training and professional performance, to validate these in *Escalafón* only documentation is needed. Teachers can be promoted annually, if they meet the requirements and the commission rules favourably. Promotion in the *Escalafón* is conditioned by the creation of new posts and free vacancies. Teachers promoted to administrative functions usually cannot continue teaching within classrooms.
2. "Special measures" are applied to schools which fail to provide adequate education.
3. PISA measures competencies according to six proficiency levels. The six proficiency levels represent groups of tasks of ascending difficulty, with Level 6 as the highest and Level 1 as the lowest. In this case, the grouping into mathematics proficiency levels was undertaken on the basis of substantive considerations relating to the nature of the underlying competencies. Students whose maximum score is below Level 1 were unable to utilise mathematical skills in the situations required by the easiest PISA tasks. At Level 5, students for example can develop and work with models for complex situations, identifying constraints and specifying assumptions. They can select, compare and evaluate appropriate problem-solving strategies for dealing with complex problems related to these models (OECD, 2004).



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