

Conclusion: Building strong foundations for quality and equity in Mexican schools

Education reform in context

Mexico has one of the largest and most complex education systems in the OECD, with almost 26 million students, 1.2 million teachers and 225 757 schools in basic education only (primary and lower secondary education). The national education system, led by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), decentralised to its 32 federal entities, must cater to the educational needs of a large and highly diverse population. For instance, more than 1 in 5 live in rural areas (21% of the total); a high number of students receive an indigenous education (more than 800 000 students) and speak more than 64 languages; and many attend multigrade schools (43% of primary schools tending to more than 1 270 000 students). Fostering better and more equitable educational outcomes that are not associated with students' socio-economic background is crucial to building a productive, fair and cohesive society in Mexico in the future, where almost half of the population (45%) are under 25 years old.

Aware of the potential gains, Mexico has taken important steps to improve the coverage and quality of its education system **and is moving from a system that is driven by inputs and numbers towards one based on quality of education and more focused on student learning** (see Box 1). To progress further on this path, it is important for the Mexican education system to continue investing efforts in strengthening the delivery of compulsory education in its schools to improve student learning.

Box 1. A synthetic view of Mexico's education reforms 2013-18

- **Quality and equity in education.** Mexico has made commendable efforts to establish quality and equity as a guiding principle in education policymaking, building consensus for the signature of a political Pact for Education and enshrining the concept of quality with equity in the law. Since 2013, the country invested to increase enrolment rates in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and upper secondary education, to support the most disadvantaged students financially and with targeted approaches, and to enhance educational infrastructure.
- **New curriculum.** Mexico introduced a new curriculum for compulsory education focused on ensuring that all students develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills required in the 21st century, including in socioemotional skills, also introducing some curricular autonomy for schools.
- **Support for teachers and schools.** Several mechanisms have been designed to strengthen schools in delivering education and to support a teaching career that

also relies on an external evaluation system for teachers. In particular, the strategy of the School at the Centre (*La Escuela al Centro*), the Teacher Professional Service (*Servicio Profesional Docente*, SPD) and a school improvement support service (*Servicio de Asistencia Técnica a la Escuela*, SATE) aim at transforming schools into learning communities and providing the tools for the education profession to identify their needs and progress in their careers.

- **Evaluation and assessment of system improvement.** Mexico has made significant progress in the creation and operation of a comprehensive national system for evaluation and assessment, with the establishment of the National Institute for Education Evaluation (INEE) as an autonomous body, the development of the National Plan for Students' Learning Evaluations (PLANEA) and the construction of a national information system (SIGED).

Note: A detailed description of these reforms can be found in Chapter 1 of the report.

This report, based on a request by the Mexican government in March 2018, presents an assessment of the country's recent education reforms (until September 2018) in light of international evidence, with analysis on progress made, remaining challenges and possible next steps to achieve the consolidation of a system that delivers educational improvement.

Mexico's education policy

From an education system that prioritised governance and vested interests, where there was lack of transparency in a number of areas, such as teacher or school leader recruitment, or the number of educational staff working in the system, Mexico has been undertaking important reforms that have achieved much progress in a relatively short amount of time. From 2012-13, the Mexican government made a series of commitments to improve the quality of compulsory education. A constitutional reform in early 2013 and subsequent legislation up to 2018 have:

- Made quality education (*educación de calidad*) a right for all Mexicans by including it in the constitution.
- Made equity both a priority across the education system and a transversal principle in the new educational model and targeted programmes for specific population and indigenous groups.
- Introduced a new curricular reform based on the vision for the Mexican learner in the 21st century, looking towards the future. The curriculum includes knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, taking into account well-being and socioemotional education, a balance that many education systems internationally are reflecting upon. The new reform also offers some degree of curricular autonomy.
- Focused on improving school environments for effective teaching and learning, upscaling full-time schools, defining minimum norms of operation for schools and introducing a new school improvement support service (*Servicio de Asistencia Técnica a la Escuela*, SATE).
- Created a teacher professional service based on merit that includes teachers, principals, supervisors and pedagogical support figures, and that has competency-

based profiles and standards, with a career structure that includes clear entry, permanence and promotion mechanisms for the teaching profession.

- Provided constitutional autonomy and responsibility to the National Institute for Education Evaluation (*Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación*, INEE) over the national evaluation system of Mexico's compulsory education system in 2012. Part of this has been the design of evaluation and assessment frameworks such as PLANEA that support schools and policy makers to ensure effective student learning and enhance the quality of education for all.
- Provided high levels of funding for the improvement of school infrastructure across the country, with a special focus on schools with the most pressing needs.

Internationally, education systems require continued policy efforts in areas that are essential for student learning: Focusing on the need to prioritise equity; providing learning environments that are fit for the 21st century and respond to students' needs; ensuring that schools are run and staffed by high-quality professionals that are well supported; and designing evaluation and assessment frameworks that can support schools and policy makers in ensuring effective student learning and enhancing the quality of education for all. In Mexico, the education system has evolved in this direction by:

- Creating consensus around a countrywide pact for education of quality for all, expressed in the legislation (Constitution and General Law of Education).
- Looking at the future with a set of reforms that focus on 21st century education that should provide Mexican students with the knowledge and skills to face the challenges of a changing society.
- Focusing on ways to help education professionals raise the quality of their practice by investing and bringing greater coherence in selection, training, evaluation and career development, and establishing a framework for accountability and improvement, moving away from the corporatist system in place in previous years.
- Enhancing transparency and accountability in the education system and rebalancing its governance by establishing the independence of a national education evaluation authority in charge of developing assessment tools to monitor educational progress.
- Demonstrating the capacity to design national policies, to adapt them when needed at a very large scale and to better serve millions of students and education professionals.
- Taking decisive steps in the construction of information and data management tools that should allow not only access to all the relevant information on the education system, but also to serve as the basis for more precise management of the entire system at all levels.

While progress has been made, many of these reforms need time to mature and flexibility to be adjusted as required to ensure schools deliver quality education for all students. In Mexico, like in many other countries, there is a considerable distance between national policymaking and the learning that happens in schools. The SEP has to cater to the individual needs of a large number of schools, students and teachers across the country through their national policymaking. This requires both substantial resources, capacity and support from state authorities, who have an important role to play as operators of the

system, as well as education stakeholders across the country. In complex education systems such as Mexico, “implementation” is not only about executing the policy but also about building and fine-tuning it collaboratively.

With an important set of policies in place, Mexico needs to make sure that there is a balance between policy design and implementation on the ground. Following a large public investment, new potential reforms need to be carefully assessed to protect the progress made, aligned with evidence of good practice and focusing on adjusting aspects that require improvement. The following sections present analysis and recommendations on ways forward in terms of policy design and implementation.

Reflection on future policy development

Priority 1: Providing equity with quality in Mexican education

Mexico has succeeded in a range of areas to enhance the opportunities to learn for all students. The constitutional reform has introduced the issue of quality and equity in education as a priority for education services and further policies have laid a strong basis to progress. Furthermore, progress in equity has advanced on two fronts. In terms of system-level policies, Mexico has focused on expanding and improving enrolments in ECEC and upper secondary education, on aiming for transparency in overall funding; establishing basic conditions for all schools to comply with; and supporting the consolidation of all-day schools. In terms of targeted programmes, the New Educational Model (NME) introduced a Strategy for Equity and Inclusion in Education (*Estrategia para la Equidad y la Inclusión en la Educación*, 2017) aiming to build a coherent approach to the different existing equity programmes. Furthermore, several programmes and initiatives have targeted their attention and resources to specific vulnerable groups such as the Full-day Schooling programme, the National Council for Education Development’s (*Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo*, CONAFE) ABCD model in rural areas or indigenous education programmes by the General Direction of Indigenous Education (*Dirección General de Educación Indígena*, DGEI). There has also been considerable investment in educational infrastructure across the country.

It is important to review these investments to ensure they are coherent and implemented to reach disadvantaged schools and students, while also enhancing quality. More concretely, Mexico might consider the following system-level and targeted approaches to enhance equity: i) introduce educational and school funding formulas so resources are distributed equitably between schools; ii) guaranteeing that disadvantaged schools receive and retain adequately qualified education professionals; iii) monitoring the coherence and impact of targeted programmes; and iv) consolidating school infrastructure by continuing to invest in the maintenance of the physical environment.

Introduce educational and school funding formulas so resources are distributed equitably between schools

Allocating resources equitably means that the schools attended by socio-economically disadvantaged students are at least as well-resourced as the schools attended by more privileged students, to compensate for inequalities in the home environment and ensure equitable outcomes. In general, the process for schools to obtain resources in Mexico is administratively complicated and does not allow for covering schools’ immediate necessities. There is no budget allocation system for schools directly, yet they have expenses for school refurbishing and materials. Schools thus rely heavily on parental

monthly contributions or the community members' own skills and resources for their daily necessities (replacement teachers, additional human or resources for disadvantaged students, paper, printers, cleaning and other material needs). This creates issues of both sustainability and equity across schools, and even within schools, as schools in more affluent communities are in a position to gather more resources. In addition, some dual shift schools may have different parental contributions – often the morning shift is thought to be of higher quality, therefore the children whose parents can pay a higher contribution tend to attend at the expense of more disadvantaged students. Mexico could consider reviewing school funding mechanisms, to allow schools some leeway for their expenses. More concretely, Mexico could:

- **Introduce educational and school funding formulas so the distribution of federal funds can be more equitable between states and between schools.**
- **Monitor the reception and use of public resources in order to ensure transparency and accountability.**

Guarantee that disadvantaged schools attract and retain qualified education professionals

In Mexico, principals of disadvantaged schools report receiving fewer educational materials and staff than advantaged schools. Mexico is among the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) countries for which this difference is the largest. Evidence also shows that teachers in more vulnerable schools such as community and indigenous structures tend to be less trained, have less experience and less education than teachers in more privileged schools both in Mexico and in OECD countries in general. This is all the more concerning since cross-country correlations show that gaps in student performance related to socio-economic status are wider when fewer qualified and experienced teachers operate in socio-economically disadvantaged schools, compared to advantaged schools.

One important area in which Mexico should embed equity as a guiding principle is in its allocation policy for the education workforce. Cross-country comparisons show that education policies ensuring that high and consistent teaching and learning standards are applied across all classrooms. Countries can compensate for student disadvantage by investing more teacher resources and/or allocating better-qualified teachers to high-need schools. To avoid good and excellent educators only teaching in more privileged areas, Mexico could:

- **Provide incentives to encourage high-quality teachers and school leaders to opt for rural and disadvantaged communities.**
- **Continue investing more generally in preparing education professionals and including specialised training for teachers working in disadvantaged schools.**

Monitor the coherence and impact of targeted programmes

Mexico should continue its efforts to strengthen and bring coherence to the numerous student- and school-targeted programmes to enhance equity in the system. The overall effort towards more equitable education is showing some effectiveness, as Mexico has continuously improved equity over the past decade. The design of these policies is also well aligned with international evidence. Some of these programmes should be maintained and closely monitored to guarantee their continued effectiveness, including

(but not limited to) the Full-day Schooling programme (PETC), the Movement against School Dropout (*Movimiento contra el abandono escolar*) and the CONAFE's successful ABCD model (*Aprendizaje Basado en la Colaboración y el Diálogo*). Cross-country comparisons show indeed that education policies that can foster improvements in equity and performance including targeting additional resources to schools with a high concentration of low-performing and disadvantaged students to keep them from falling behind.

These programmes are numerous and sometimes target the same population or the same issues; subsequently, it is possible that they may overlap and reduce the efficiency of the overall strategy for equity. Based on these observations, Mexico should make sure the programmes targeted to support the most disadvantaged schools and students actually bridge the gap in terms of learning and other educational outcomes (such as remaining in school or completing studies). In this area, Mexico could:

- **Monitor the impact and coherence of existing programmes for equity.**
- **Evaluate to what extent programmes support disadvantaged students, enable them to integrate and do well in the “regular” education system.**
- **Maintain and scale up the programmes that prove effective, such as the Full-day Schooling programme (*Programa Escuela de Tiempo Completo*, PETC).**

Consolidate school infrastructure and continue with investment and maintenance of the physical environments

The scope of Mexico's recent investment in school infrastructure is remarkable. In order to reap full benefits from this much-needed support to the physical environment, federal authorities should nonetheless prioritise their investment and secure sustainable sources of funding. To consolidate this effort, Mexico could:

- **Review carefully the Schools on Certificates of National Education Infrastructure (*Escuelas al Certificados de Infraestructura Educativa Nacional*, ECIEN) funding allocation approach to invest in and maintain its school infrastructure in a sustained way.**
- **Focus resources for infrastructure on those schools that do not reach the basic standards of safety as set up by the INIFED.**
- **Find a balance between guaranteeing that all students have appropriate physical conditions to learn and stretching resources too thin across all schools.**

Priority 2: Providing 21st century learning to all students

Overall, Mexico's curriculum reform design aligns to best international practices and to the vision the country set for its education system. The efforts to engage with stakeholders from diverse corners of the education system in a consultation to elaborate the curriculum are commendable and contribute to a high-quality curriculum, while the education authorities proved extremely skilful at managing large-scale projects such as the production of new instructional material on a tight schedule.

The new curriculum will start being implemented sequentially from August 2018, which leaves time before its effects can be observed in the classroom and, especially, on student

learning. However, Mexico can already take some elements into account to overcome existing challenges which may put the success of this large-scale investment at risk. While some elements in the design of the curriculum could be refined or enhanced, **education authorities in Mexico should focus their efforts on providing all the support necessary to accompany students, educators and school communities as well as authorities at lower levels of government to take ownership of this new curriculum and implement it properly.**

To do so, the SEP and its counterparts at the state level could consider providing support for teachers and schools in the short term and rethinking educator training for the long run. Although curricular autonomy was the only component that was piloted, authorities could take the time to evaluate pilot schools' experience with curricular autonomy (those who tested it during the 2017/18 school year) and to adjust the implementation process and/or the curriculum itself based on the lessons these schools learnt. In all cases, the Mexican administration should pay special attention to fine-tuning the implementation of this curriculum, for it otherwise risks tiring its educational community and losing its support. More concretely, Mexico might consider taking action in the following areas: i) support teachers and school leaders to take ownership of the new curriculum; and ii) respect the timing and collaboration required for effective curriculum implementation.

Prioritise investment in teachers' and school leaders' capacity to implement the new curriculum

The new curriculum is facing an educational workforce that apparently considers it lacks the training and support to take ownership and effectively translate the curriculum into better learning. While on visit to Mexico, the OECD team was repeatedly told by teachers themselves, school leaders and education experts that school staff was ill-prepared to start teaching the new curriculum in September 2018, given the lack of effective training. These arguments were presented especially concerning socioemotional education.

Traditionally, across countries, curricula have tended to be designed outside of schools and provided to them as self-contained products through in-service teacher training. This created major gaps between the intended curriculum and the reality of what was implemented in most countries. Without proper attention, a new curriculum may not be implemented for a range of reasons: local stakeholders, including teachers, may refuse it; the teaching staff may not know how to teach the new content because neither their initial nor continuous training prepared them for it; it may get dismissed in favour of the content that gets assessed through student evaluations. Similarly, Mexico should support more its teachers and school leaders in taking ownership of the new curriculum. For instance, Mexican authorities could:

- **Provide additional support at the school level in the short term for teachers and school leaders to master the new curriculum and the new pedagogical approaches it demands.**
- **Implement the Technical Support Service to Schools (*Servicio de Asistencia Técnica a la Escuela, SATE*) aligned with the curricular reform in all schools.**
- **Rethink teacher and school leader training by building on the existing strategies for continuous professional development in the medium to long run.**

Give schools the time and agency required for effective curriculum implementation

Mexico adapted a number of curriculum design principles that were agreed upon internationally. Curricular autonomy was piloted in some schools during the 2017/18 school year. Some conclusions were drawn about conditions for success in participating schools but it remains unclear what actions were taken to reinforce schools' capacity to assume this autonomy, for instance. Questions remain about who, inside schools, should be in charge of conducting the extra activities and what can be achieved in regular schools, which only have half an hour a day reserved for these activities. Curricular autonomy offers some margins for professionals to innovate but the benefit it can bring to students can be reduced if the options are too limited.

Curriculum design and change principles from international evidence and experience refer to processes and interactions that contribute to enact the curricular content, such as teacher agency, authenticity, interrelation, flexibility and engagement. While it is still too early in the implementation process to know whether some of these principles have been adopted, these can help guide the next stages of curriculum changes in Mexico as follows:

- **Allow more time for education stakeholders to test and adjust the curriculum.**
- **Give more agency and support to school actors and subnational authorities in adapting and implementing the curriculum.**

Priority 3: Supporting teachers and schools

Mexico has made significant progress towards transforming schools into learning communities and implementing concrete efforts to introduce a professional teacher service. The School at the Centre strategy (*La Escuela al Centro*) was created by the SEP to give coherence at the school level to Mexico's 2013 reform priorities and reorganise school support programmes accordingly. It aims to reduce the bureaucratic load for schools and guarantee that they have the skills and resources to foster active participation and collaboration within the school community, with the purpose of enhancing educational outcomes. The strategy reflects Mexico's intention of building capacity within schools and local governments as a key enabler to transform schools, supporting the development of a stronger teaching workforce and improving the education system. Principals, teachers and other pedagogical support staff such as Mexico's new school improvement support service (SATE) are active agents of this transformation with the schools.

At the same time, the Teacher Professional Service (*Servicio Profesional Docente*, SPD 2013) has established a framework for the educational profession, including teachers, school principals, vice-principals, co-ordinators, supervisors, inspectors, and technical pedagogical advisors (*asesores técnico-pedagógicos*, ATP). It sets out the basis for selection, induction, promotion and tenure possibilities, as well as for continuous professional training for educational staff. The SPD aims to guarantee knowledge and capacity for educational staff and bring into a coherent whole several elements that reward good performance and improvement and provide incentives for both schools and individuals.

Still, there is scope to further develop both policies to ensure that they contribute to effectively support teachers and schools towards enhancing student learning. More

concretely, Mexico might consider taking action in the following: i) strengthen leadership and school-level collaboration to enact the School at the Centre strategy; ii) promote the career perspective of the Teacher Professional Service; iii) prioritise continuous professional development and the SATE to grow education professionals' quality; and iv) keep adjusting the professional performance appraisal to deliver on both its formative and summative functions.

Strengthen leadership and school-level collaboration to enact the School at the Centre strategy (La Escuela al Centro)

Mexico should continue its efforts to enhance schools' leadership and capacity to make decisions, as it is essential for schools to be the improvement actors they need to be in the 21st century. To reinforce the efforts and achieve more effective school capacity, leadership, teaching practice and, in general, support quality and equity in education, Mexico could:

- **Keep sharpening the skills of school leaders, supervisors and support actors such as the ATPs.**
- **Strengthen professional collaboration within and between schools.**

Promote the career perspective of the Teacher Professional Service

The professional performance appraisal has focused a large share of the attention around the teaching profession, to the expense of other career items included in the Professional Teacher Service (SPD). To keep strengthening the professionalisation of educators in Mexico it would be important to also focus on other components of the Professional Teacher Service as essential for an education system to fulfil its mission. Mexico's education authorities should support further actions to show that the SPD is a coherent career structure beyond evaluation for education professionals. To this extent, relevant authorities should:

- **Ensure that mentoring (*tutoría*) takes place for all new entrants in the teaching profession, as well as for new school leaders, supervisors and ATPs.**
- **Certify that new entrants from another career than education have pedagogical skills or have access to extra pedagogical training upon entry.**
- **Guarantee that the training and promotion components of the SPD are effectively implemented.**

Prioritise continuous professional development and the SATE to grow education professionals' quality

Central authorities introduced a new national training strategy for teachers, school leaders, supervisors and advice and support staff, which allowed for training many. The SEP also led a large consultation among education professionals (92 882 respondents) to understand which training areas should be strengthened. While training has reached many through virtual platforms, interviews by the OECD team reveal a demand for training to be better tailored to the schools and to their teachers' needs. This is consistent with the literature, which finds that the most effective training strategies contain a mix of modalities: online and in-person programmes, and courses outside of the schools with supervised project in the schools. It appears **that professional development opportunities have not yet evolved to meet the need for skills and knowledge update.**

Recent efforts to strengthen the national strategy for professional development must be acknowledged. However, the offer needs to improve in order to allow teachers, school leaders, support and advisory staff and supervisors to grow as professionals. In this regard, it is important to ensure that teacher professional development elements form a coherent whole and are directed towards the improvement of classroom practices and student learning. In this area, Mexico could:

- **Enhance professional development at the school level via collaborative learning and the SATE.**
- **Balance the modules in the national and the state strategies for education staff development (*estrategias de formación docente*) between in-person, school-based and remote (online) options.**
- **Make sure offers for continuous professional development align and are clearly linked with the professional standards (*Perfil, Parámetros e Indicadores (PPI) para Docentes y Técnicos Docentes, PPI para Personal con Funciones de ATP and PPI para Personal con Funciones de Dirección y de Supervisión*), and with the knowledge and skills required by the new curriculum.**

Keep adjusting the professional performance appraisal to deliver on both its formative and summative functions

Appraisal of teachers – and of school professional in general – can contribute to improvement in educational outcomes by holding education professionals accountable (summative function) and by revealing their strengths and areas for professional progress (formative function) (OECD, 2010^[1]). In both instances, performance appraisal is only a tool for educational improvement and should, therefore, be adjusted constantly to fulfil its role. In order to guarantee that professional performance appraisal fulfils its improvement role, Mexican authorities should:

- **Make sure the appraisal instruments are adequate to assess performance.**
- **Offer better-tailored support for education professionals after they receive the results, to update their knowledge and develop their professional skills.**
- **Maintain the summative function of the appraisal while making sure that the professionals that obtain unsatisfactory results have access to programmes that give them the opportunity to improve between appraisals.**

Priority 4: Focusing evaluation and assessment on schools and student learning

Mexico has made important progress in the consolidation of a comprehensive national system for education evaluation and assessment. This system is essential to support quality and equity in education as mandated by the Mexican Constitution (Article 3 and General Education Law). In this regard, at an instrumental level, PLANEA is a major step towards making the assessment and evaluation system more formative, and the actions undertaken by the INEE and the SEP to develop evaluation and assessment capacities at the subnational level are commendable. These include the national evaluation system (*Sistema Nacional de Evaluación Educativa, SNEE*) and the design of a national evaluation programme (*Programa Nacional de Evaluación Educativa, PNEE*). As part of this strategy, Mexico has started making a considerable effort to gather, analyse and disseminate evaluation and assessment information that is meant to guide policy design

and support monitoring activity at the macro level while providing schools and teachers valuable input to improve their operation and pedagogical practices.

To build on the progress made, Mexico might consider giving priority, attention and resources to the following: i) ensuring that evaluation and assessment results are used to improve policies and practices; ii) using system evaluation to identify vulnerable student groups and effectively inform policy instruments to support them; iii) investing more in evaluation and assessment capacity development at the state and school levels; iv) encouraging the formative use of the results of standardised student assessment to improve classroom practice; and v) using the mechanisms for educational information and management to their full potential at the national, state and school levels.

Ensure that all evaluation and assessment information (like PLANEA results and information contained in the Integral System of Evaluation Results (SIRE) is used to improve policies and school practices

The accountability function of the evaluation and assessment system is essential to secure quality and equity in education as mandated by law and Mexico has made substantial progress thanks to the co-ordination of the INEE, the SEP, state authorities and relevant stakeholders. Providing autonomy to the INEE and entrusting it with the co-ordination role of the SNEE are important steps to consolidate an independent and solid evaluation and assessment system in Mexico. In only a few years, the INEE, the SEP and state authorities have undertaken significant steps in the design and implementation of assessment, appraisal and evaluation tools for students, teachers, schools and for the education system as a whole.

In this process, the INEE has also contributed to the collection and processing of an impressive amount of information that can be key to the further development of the education system in Mexico. It is important to give more support to the effective use of this evaluation and assessment information for the purpose of guiding the work and decisions made by policy makers, schools, teachers, students, families, unions, researchers and other stakeholders. Mexico might consider the following:

- **Support schools and state authorities to use the information generated by evaluation and assessment practices.**
- **Continue encouraging independent research using evaluation and assessment data and information and make sure that it is extensively disseminated.**

Use system evaluation to identify vulnerable student groups and inform policy instruments to support them

System evaluation in Mexico has considerable potential to inform policies to tackle inequalities in education and monitor their progress. In this sense, it is important to reinforce the connection between evaluation evidence on the one hand and equity policy and mechanisms on the other. Within the overall evaluation and assessment framework, education system evaluation has arguably the strongest potential to pay attention to equity issues and to inform current policies and programmes (e.g. PROSPERA) on how to address these and target support more effectively. In this domain, Mexico might consider the following policy lines:

- **Ensure and reinforce the monitoring of student performance across specific groups (e.g. by gender, socio-economic or immigrant/cultural background,**

special needs, remote/rural location, as already established in the INEE's *Panorama Educativo de México*).

- **Take action to develop solid instruments and programmes to tackle the challenges of disadvantaged students.**

Invest more in evaluation and assessment capacity development at the state and school levels

A central priority is to consolidate efforts to improve the capacity for evaluation and assessment at the state and school levels. Evaluation and assessment capacity and expertise at the federal level are impressive but more work remains to be done to develop capacities at the state and school levels across the country. A priority is to improve the competencies for evaluation of state educational authorities and staff in their supervision structures through the implementation and development of specific programmes such as the SATE and ATPs. In addition, investing in the educational leadership skills of school principals should be a priority. The objective is that school leaders operate effective feedback, coaching and appraisal arrangements for their staff and effectively lead whole-school evaluation processes. Teachers could also benefit from a range of development opportunities. These include: improving skills for formative assessment including engaging students in assessment; enhancing the capacity to assess against the student learning objectives defined in the new educational model, including promoting collaborative work among teachers around student summative assessment; and improving the capacity to collect and analyse information for self-improvement. In this regard, Mexico might consider the following:

- **Support the development of specific evaluation and assessment competencies.**
- **Strengthen school self-evaluation taking advantage of the instruments already in place or recently designed.**
- **Ensure the participation of all levels of government in supporting the creation of evaluation and assessment capacities within schools.**
- **Reinforce collaboration between the SEP and the INEE in building capacity for evaluation and assessment at the state and school levels.**

Encourage the formative use of the results of PLANEA to improve school practice

Despite efforts made, it seems that the results of standardised student assessments are not systematically used for learning and general education enhancement at the classroom level. It is important to give more visibility and adjust (if needed) the pedagogical materials that accompany PLANEA to support teachers in the classroom. Information collected during the meetings of the OECD team in Mexico indicates that standardised assessments are not fully perceived as solid evidence about the learning outcomes of individual students, leading to some teachers and schools not using PLANEA for pedagogical purposes. This is a missed opportunity not just for schools or teachers but for the whole system. For example, PLANEA scores can be an indicator to measure to what extent the constitutional right to receive (quality) education has been accomplished and provide guidance about the specific needs of students in the classroom.

A number of reasons might explain the lack of use of PLANEA in some schools. For example, the numerical syntheses of student proficiency might receive attention from teachers and school leaders in data dissemination processes, focusing less on pedagogical

information linked to these numbers. Thus, the data and information collected in the evaluations are used mainly for monitoring purposes. Also, teachers might consider that if the student could not solve items in the exam then the problem lies with the test, considering that it is not appropriately contextualised for each student/school/region. Indeed, materials accompanying the reports of PLANEA results are meant to be contextualised and the tests carefully prepared by pedagogical experts. Another potential explanation is related to the distortion and unintended effects of using standardised assessments in classrooms. More concretely, some teachers and schools might be replacing their summative and even their own formative instruments by PLANEA instruments. In this sense, teachers do not fully develop their own professional and pedagogical potential and standardised formative assessment lose their aim in the classroom. In order to tackle this type of challenges, Mexico might consider the following:

- **Take action to disseminate the formative profile of PLANEA among all the relevant actors in the system.**
- **Ensure that all the instruments and actors around and within the school contribute to using standardised assessments as pedagogical tools.** This report does not suggest adapting or adjusting pedagogical practice to align to PLANEA results. The results of standardised evaluations assessments should be only one of several inputs to design and adjust pedagogical practice. The point of this recommendation is that PLANEA seems not to be used at its full potential if it is not considered part of these pedagogical discussions in all schools and classrooms.
- **Explore the possibility of undertaking pedagogical support meetings based on PLANEA's results.**
- **Make sure that PLANEA aligns well, technically, with the new curriculum.**

Use the mechanisms for educational information and management to their full potential at the national, state and school levels

Mexico has made substantial progress in terms of generating solid information and data on the system in only a few years. With the CEMABE census in 2013, Mexico started on a strong progressive path to produce rich information for decision making, monitoring and administration of the system. The SIGED can play a prominent role as it has laid a strong basis for building and maintaining a solid knowledge of the education system, and its use and impact on the education system has potential. The SIGED aims at collecting information about the different aspects of the education system: students, teachers, schools and documentation. In principle, it should be offering rich information for decision making and improvement practices to every single member of the education community in Mexico.

The SIGED has two interfaces, one for the general public and the other for educational authorities (with substantially more information). In the first case, a standard user from the general public, a student for example, should be able to consult his/her academic records and school trajectory. For educational authorities at all levels (national and state), the SIGED will offer comprehensive information that will allow comparing and grouping information at the school, state and federal levels. In this sense, the SIGED might be an excellent instrument to guide decisions inside schools during their discussions related to their *Ruta de Mejora* (school improvement route). It is essential to continue the SIGED's

implementation and development path in order to help state and school authorities provide solid information on a single platform. Without reliable information about the system, it is hard to monitor progress made at the subnational and school levels and almost impossible to do so in a comparative perspective with other institutions. To complete the implementation of the SIGED, Mexico might consider the following:

- **Continue investing resources to ensure the SIGED’s completion, systematic updating and optimal operation.**
- **Ensure that all the relevant actors in the system have access to and make use of tools such as the SIGED.**
- **Strengthen the use of data to inform policy development at the state level.**
- **Put special emphasis on enhancing the use of data at the school level.**

General considerations for implementation

At present, it is important for the new government to continue taking coherent action in education, focusing on student learning which is a priority for the Mexican population. This report has highlighted some of the policy progress and challenges that will be important for the country to tackle. In Mexico however, a complex governance system requires a focus on implementation, as reforms will not reach schools unless educational authorities tackle issues of effective implementation. From research and discussions with many stakeholders, this conclusion goes further and proposes a number of transversal insights.

Mexico has traditionally followed a top-down implementation approach in public policy, and has demonstrated **its capacity to implement national policies and programmes** to a very large scale, for millions of students, teachers or principals in past years. The data on implementation of policies and programmes is impressive, from the numbers of schools that have received funding for investment in infrastructure, to the numbers of teachers who have gone through evaluation or initial selection or training programmes. Still, this top-down approach has limits that might be reverted with a revisited implementation strategy that could reinforce inclusiveness, horizontality and collaboration, and insist on the idea of putting learning and students at the centre. The following aspects offer a guide:

Reinforce the vision and goals of the education system

The education reform package initiated in 2012-13 undertook a major step when the Mexican constitution gave education policy the mandate of providing education of quality for all Mexicans. However, despite the consensus about the importance of improving education among the Mexican society, it seems that the communication of the vision and goals of the education reform has not been as successful as desired. Mexico’s authorities could revisit the communication instruments used until now. This communication strategy should reinforce the vision present in the new educational model, emphasising the benefits that recent changes in education policies might bring to children, teachers and school communities. Communication has been carried out through social media, press and television, but different communication approaches should be defined depending on target audiences, with key messages and channels for effective diffusion.

Promote stakeholder engagement

Changes in education policy require very strong stakeholder engagement. On the one hand, teachers and students in Mexico undertake their activities under very demanding conditions in most of the cases so it is essential that teachers, students and schools, as a group, understand the new mechanisms as a support tool for their work in the classroom and the school. On the other hand, important and visible groups and institutions have also been present in the debate about education policy in Mexico. Their opinions and contributions to the debate have been essential not just in the creation of the system, but also in the adjustment made in past years and even in the current discussion about a radical transformation or extinction of the system. The current education reform package was the result of the broad political and social pact that took place in 2012. However, this type of consensus cannot only be used at the beginning and should be a regular part of the process of monitoring and revising education policy. Obviously, the kind of pact that was undertaken in 2012 cannot be repeated on a regular basis, given the enormous amount of political and social energy that it takes, but other institutional models can be explored in order to make sure that all stakeholders feel included and are consulted regularly.

Whatever the form of these consultations and participatory mechanisms, they should be including actors beyond the SEP and the INEE, such as teacher unions (the National Union of Education Workers, SNTE, taking into account its plurality), teachers and school leaders at the school level, the subnational authorities in the National Council of Educational Authorities (*Consejo Nacional de Autoridades Educativas*, CONAEDU) at the national and regional levels, the Council for Social Participation in Education (*Consejo de Participación Social en la Educación*, CONAPASE) and a range of non-governmental associations and parents' associations, including those who stand a critical voice about the current reform.

Take the context into consideration

For implementation to be effective, a good balance of responsibilities is required between the federal government and states authorities. Furthermore, to make sure that implementation occurs across the country, asymmetries across regions should be taken into account. Currently, there is a clear normative and operative division of responsibilities between the SEP and state authorities. In some cases, some state governments have the resources and expertise to undertake the changes that the education reform imply, but this is not possible in others. The SEP's bureaucratic organisation may be costly and difficult to articulate across Mexico's large geography and the pace of reforms may be high. To ensure adequate contexts for effective education policies, governance can be rebalanced, distributing education management attributions clearly to the different government levels. Similar dichotomy and challenges can be found between the normative functions in evaluation assigned to the INEE and the operative function of the SEP in this regard.

Revising responsibilities and accountabilities of the federal and state education secretariats, and between institutions of the same level of government (such as the SEP and the INEE) can result in more transparency in education policy overall. With the current unfinished decentralisation, implementation cannot be effective across all states in Mexico if the obvious asymmetries across the 32 entities are not considered. At the lower levels of management, supervision and school leadership throughout the system is essential, and investments for these professionals to be able to implement reforms are key

to ensure that evaluations and the information that they provide can be effectively translated into better pedagogical practices and learning experiences for students.

Secure enough resources

Implementation often requires significantly more resources and expertise than policy design. Currently, low levels of expenditure per student and unclear resource allocations to schools are challenging, as there needs to be a minimum for schools to function, for inequalities to be tackled effectively and for improvement to happen across the country. Mexico can consider resource allocation to schools more clearly, looking into relevant international practice and with the appropriate accountability mechanisms to ensure expenditures in schools.

Revise the strategy

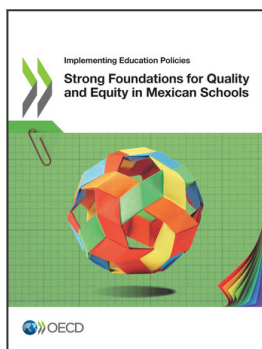
Given the dimensions of the country, the time, the engagement of the states and of the many stakeholders involved, implementation mechanisms should be revised regularly. The vision of the education reform in Mexico oriented to pursuing quality education for all should be reinforced and clearly communicated to Mexican society and policies aligned with this objective. In light of the changes in the public administration in Mexico, it is extremely important to keep to the constitutional mandate of providing quality education for all.

Good and well-intentioned policy design has only limited possibilities of succeeding if there is no strong engagement from stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, students, parents, teacher unions and organisations of the civil society) and if public administration does not make the adjustments needed to correct the asymmetries between the design and implementation of policies and secures enough resources for these processes. In this regard, the merits of recent education reforms in Mexico require careful support and review to ensure that they reach schools across Mexico and result in improved student learning.

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