



# EDUCATION IN TIMES OF COVID-19

The system in the emergency room

# Education

## in times of COVID-19



### SYNTHESIS

#### AN UNPRECEDENTED CURRENT SITUATION

Since the beginning of this federal administration in 2018, the education sector in Mexico has had to adapt to various styles and ways of operating and managing different issues, ranging from administrative, organizational and budgetary, to those that have to do with the new ways in which the various actors in the National Education System (SEN by its acronym in Spanish) have had to interact with each other.

Of all the government areas, the one dealing with education has been one of those with more adjust-

ments. The previous statement has meant that the vast majority of the members of the system have had to acquire special skills to understand the new ways and rules of operation first, and second, the objectives and goals expected from each of them.

It is essential to insist that all these adjustments have affected the SEN operability and in consequence, the continuity of the policies that were being implemented, without these changes being the result of any review of the evidence of what was working

well and still had to be adjusted. Combined with this situation, in the first trimester, the COVID-19 pandemic was added, threatening the education planning and results for the rest of 2020.

In this new and unstable scenario, the educational sector has been forced to take drastic actions. The main action taken was restricting mobility and social interaction in schools in mid-March, which resulted in distance learning, implemented for the rest of the school year. At the time of the publication of this report, this action remains current and is considered to be extended until the beginning of the new school year in August.

In Mexico, as in the rest of the world, the education authorities have been forced to take extraordinary actions to rescue the school cycle. One of the tools that have been widely used in urban areas with good connectivity has been online education. This measure has been reinforced along with other technological supports such as television, radio, and the permanent use of printed material. Unfortunately, the efforts to take education to all the children around the country have brought uneven results. Places where there are no connectivity or technological supports, especially in the most vulnerable areas, children had not been able to make the expected progress.



Image: horario de clases para secundaria. Source: SEP, 2020 at <https://educacionbasica.sep.gob.mx/>

Despite these exclusions, the decision of continuing with the rescue of the school cycle with the actions and resources available under these circumstances must be recognized as an institutional achievement by the education authorities in Mexico.

In other words, the strategy of making use of every one of the technological means available represented, perhaps, the only option in this delicate scenario.



Image: [blogs.idadb.org/educacion/es/cierredeescuelas](https://blogs.idadb.org/educacion/es/cierredeescuelas)

## CHALLENGES OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM DURING THE PANDEMIC

Many of the decisions the federal government has made amid the COVID-19 pandemic have been questioned and debated. This has been due to the scarce and dubious information provided to the general public. This situation has caused a lot of national and international analysts and experts, not only to doubt the circumstances but also to join forces to propose complementary data and indicators to counter the effects of misinformation that the government itself has generated.

According to a Mitofsky poll, 54.3% of the population in Mexico doubts the information provided by the government about what is happening surrounding the COVID-19 situation in Mexico. If both experts and polls are correct, it is evident that the government and the social and business sector, among others, may be making bad decisions due to the lack of sustenance.

The SEP (Secretariat of Public Education by its acronym in Spanish) has also suffered the consequences of having data and indicators that lack credibility; this has considerably limited the accommodation of education responses in the list of priorities.

Even though The SEP and the rest of the education authorities have made efforts to maintain the SEN working, it is clear that there should have been better improved and better-structured politics generated. A clear case refers to how the system has had a lack of attention toward the most vulnerable population. It must have been tough to do by the end of the school year, but it shouldn't be for returning to school projection.

**The SEN finds itself vulnerable due to the quality of the information related to the national context in the health aspect since it is still dubious, weak, and questioned.**



That has not helped the system to have enough foundations to create emerging ideal public policies to fulfill the edge of the biggest problems of education. Additional to this issue, we have the cutting of the budget in the chapters of operational expenses and general services that are paralyzing the capacity of response that the SEN could have had.

Reliable information is essential so the SEN could argue the severity of the education problem to face the pandemic and promote accurate and precise public policies that ensure the most vulnerable students to receive basic education.

The SEN commitment toward Mexican society is enormous. The continuity of attending 90% of the elementary curriculum and 85%<sup>1</sup> of the preschool curriculum will rely on its minimum performance and proper operation.

In other words, the responsibility that the education authorities have to attend the education issue in the country must go beyond a regulatory commitment and most be address as a special commitment in which over 25 million children await for good decisions.

<sup>1</sup> INEE (National Institute of Educational Evaluation by its acronym in Spanish) inform of compulsory education in Mexico, 2019.

## BASIC EDUCATION ENROLLMENT IN THE MEXICAN REPUBLIC

YEAR	PRESCHOOL	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE SCHOOL	TOTAL
2016-2017	4,931,986	14,137,862	6,710,845	25,780,693
2017-2018	4,891,002	14,020,204	6,536,261	25,447,467
2018-2019	4,780,787	13,972,269	6,473,608	25,226,664
2019-2020	5,127,896*	13,910,775*	6,462,052*	25,500,723*

\*Estimations

Source: In-house product with information from SEP (Secretariat of Public Education by its acronym in Spanish) data: <https://tinyurl.com/y88b6ctm>

## EDUCATION CHALLENGES FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

According to today's extinct INEE, the right to quality education is acknowledged in international law and national legislation as a fundamental and primary human right as it is an essential enhancer precondition of individual development and the enjoyment of other rights. The Mexican state aims to ensure the right to quality education throughout the compulsory basic education.

In 2015, 4.8 million children and teenagers between 3 and 17 years old didn't attend school being, preschool, and middle school, the ones with more absenteeism registered. During this pandemic, one of the priorities for the education authorities should be to promote a strategy to ensure the conditions for those who already have the compulsory education, so they move to different grades and educational levels so that they can complete their education at the expected age, but above all, satisfactorily.<sup>2</sup>

The backlog presented in rural communities and with the highest social underdevelopment should always be present in the work agenda of the education authorities. Given the conditions of poverty that will exist in the country once the next school year begins, the objective should be to reverse the conditions of precariousness, lack of materials, and infrastructure that these localities have, to have a positive impact on learning.

#### SCHOOL POPULATION ATTENDANCE BY AGE GROUP



3-5 AÑOS



6-11 AÑOS



12-14 AÑOS

3-5 AÑOS		6-11 AÑOS		12-14 AÑOS	
2012	4,670,393	2012	13,315,124	2012	6,350,170
2016	5,097,349	2016	13,853,212	2016	6,663,624

Source: INEE, estimates based on ENIGH 2012, socio-economical conditions module (INEGI [National Institute of Statistics and Geograph by its acronym in Spanish], 2013a), and ENIGH (National Survey of Household Income and Expenses) 2016 (INEGI, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> INEE inform of compulsory education in Mexico, 2019.

The necessity of urgently reverse this scenario is reflected in the attendance rate, which doesn't show any significant favorable changes. On the two following charts, we compare the years 2010 and 2016, and which analysis reflects a devastating picture for the population in the condition of poverty, indigenous people, or people living in highly marginalized municipalities.

An additional element that should be considered for the next school cycle is the school drop-out at the upper-middle level. This is a rooted problem in Mexico, as it significantly limits the completion of compulsory education. From the total enrolment of middle education in the country, 80%<sup>3</sup> is within the public sphere. The above clear that the state still has a significant social debt to guarantee access, permanence, and, the conclusion of compulsory education.

Although many strategies have been implemented to avoid students to drop-out middle education, this issue still current. Up to the 2018-2019 school cycle, a considerable reduction in number is evident in comparison with the 2016-2017 school cycle and 2017-2018. However, under the circumstances of

#### SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION BY THE CONDITION OF POVERTY ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP (2012 Y 2016)

CONDITION OF POVERTY	TOTAL POPULATION					
	3-5		6-11		12-14	
	2012	2016	2012	2016	2012	2016
Poverty	66.9	66.9	98.2	98.6	90.8	91.2
Extreme poverty	53.3	53.3	95.1	97.0	79.6	77.5
Moderate poverty	71.3	71.3	99.0	98.9	93.9	93.6
Vulnerable due to social deprivations	65.2	65.2	99.1	99.0	91.9	92.1
Vulnerable due to income	99.8	99.8	100.0	100.0	99.9	99.9

Source: INEE, calculations based on the Measurement of Poverty in Mexico (Coneval [National council of social development policies by its acronym in Spanish], 2013 and 2017).

#### SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATE OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION AND THE POPULATION RESIDING IN MUNICIPALITIES WITH HIGH MARGINALIZATION BY AGE GROUP (2012 Y 2016)

POPULATION	AGE RANGE	2012	2016
Indigenous population (CDI-National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Communities)	3 a 5	72.2	76.5
	6 a 11	98.0	98.0
	12 a 14	87.2	88.3
Municipalities with high marginalization	3 a 5	74.2	78.8
	6 a 11	97.9	98.5
	12 a 14	90.9	88.4

Source: INEE calculations based on the Measurement of Poverty in Mexico (Coneval, 2013, and 2017).

<sup>3</sup> INEE Inform of compulsory education in Mexico, 2019.



poverty and low economic growth expected in the country in the following months, it is estimated that this number can be increased again to previously unseen ranges. Special care should be taken at this educational level to avoid that school drop-out becomes the trigger of other social problems such as family violence, criminal activity, among others.

have the infrastructure and equipment needed, its undeniable that this modality has become a real, useful and, relatively efficient alternative to follow up on educational programs during the COVID-19 contingency.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION

YEAR	SCHOOL DROP-OUT	ENROLLMENT
2015-2016	13.3%	4,985,080
2016-2017	15.2%	5,128,518
2017-2018	14.5%	5,237,003
2018-2019	12.9%	5,239,675

Source:: In-house producti with SEP data: <https://tinyurl.com/y6va683x>

One of the main priorities and debts of the Mexican government is being in the most vulnerable populations. However, even though educational backwardness exists in vulnerable localities and online education is provided mainly in geographical areas that



Image: class schedule for Secondary Education of SEP. Source: matyapoyo.com

## THE CHALLENGE OF INTERNET ACCESS AND THE USE OF TECHNOLOGIES

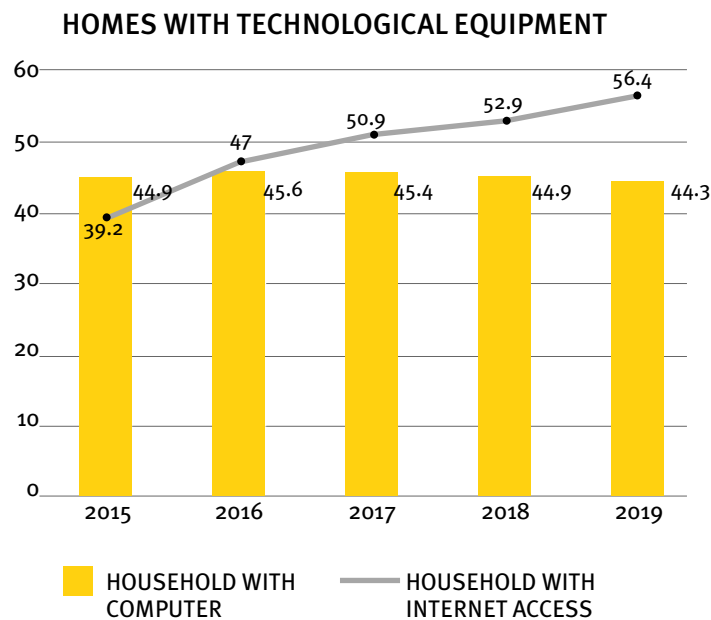
According to INEGI, 70.1% of the population over six years old has internet access and, this number has been increasing since 2015 when the users were only 57.4%. This coupled with the fact that only 44.3% have computer equipment in their homes.

The above means that less than half of the population in the country could have access to take courses through the use of communication and information technologies.

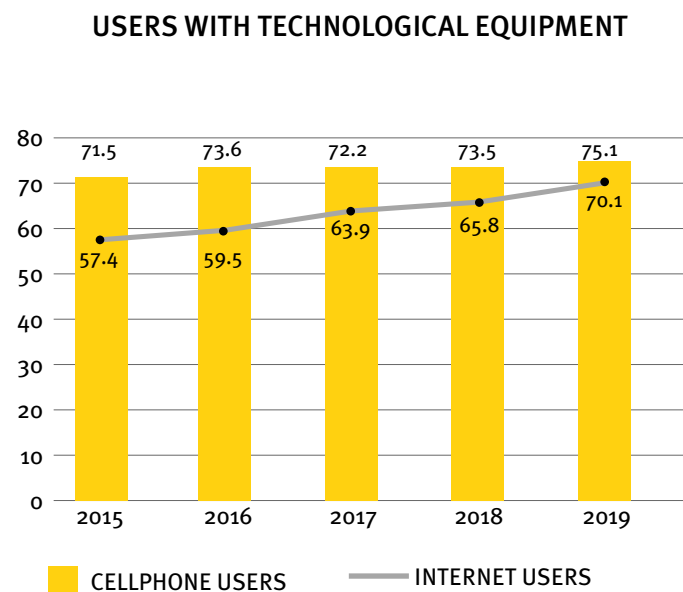
Considering a population of students of 25,500,723<sup>4</sup>, and having in mind the percentage of the population that has at least one computer equipment at home (44.3%) and internet service (70.01%), an estimate of students who are taking classes could be around 8 million students. However, taking as a reference

<sup>4</sup> Refer to the EB (Basic education for its acronym in Spanish) enrollment chart in the Mexican Republic.

**Only 44.3% of people older than six years old has a computer in their home.**



Source: INEE, 2019.



Source: INEE, 2019.

that there is only one computer equipment at home and that the average number of children per household in Mexico is 2, the numbers could probably decrease closer to 4 million students taking online classes at home.

In this sense, a determinant question emerges to formulate strategies and the necessary recommendations for the school cycle in August: what is the quality delivered within these courses, and how are students learning? According to a survey conducted by Valora Consultoría, within the first week of the pandemic, 43.1% of the teachers surveyed felt a little bit or not prepared for online education, 50% perceives it as very difficult to develop their job online.

This seems to reflect the scarce job that the Basic Public Education System (SEBP for its acronym in Spanish) does in developing digital abilities among teachers and provide or develop resources to learn online.

The federal budget assignation to teacher's training and the foreseen resources to digital inclusion in basic public education could explain the situation. The spending on training has decreased in real terms 74.8% while the digital inclusion program had no budget assigned on the expenditure budget of the federation during 2019 and 2020.



Image: <https://unionguajuato.mx>

## PRIORITIES AGENDA

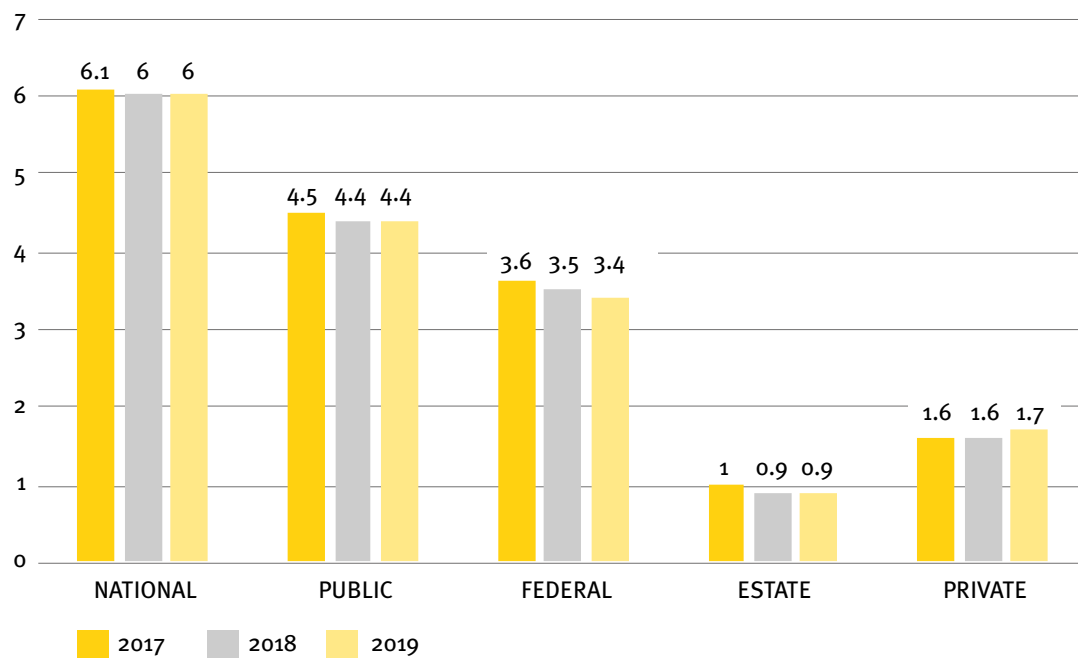
For the educational sector, in section 11 of PEF (expenditure budget of the federation by its acronym in Spanish), the amount of 326,282.7 million pesos were assigned at the beginning of the year, of which 42.8% had been used by the end of the first quarter. During the analysis, it was detected that in the first two months, there was an under-spending of -11.54% and -6.65%, respectively. It is noteworthy that by March, there was an increase in expenses of 0.76% from what was originally scheduled. The above suggests that many of the alerts surrounding the pandemic were on inside the SEP, and, at the same time, they had to make many adaptations to meet diverse requirements inside the sector.

The national expense in education, public and private, has been ranging from 6% of GDP for several years. In the 2020 budget, an increase of 2.2% was foreseen in real terms compared to the 2010<sup>5</sup> budget, this increase is very moderate if we consider the absences in the sector and the very ambitious government agenda this is visible in the shortcomings that continue to be present in the SEN, as these exempli-

<sup>5</sup> The budget for 2010 was 203,143 million pesos. The source consulted for this information was Valora Consultoría.

fy how, during the decision-making, much more resources should be allocated to the education sector than there have been so far, moreover, this could be in future an important indicator to assess if we are on the right track.

EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION EXPENDITURE (% EDUCATION EXPENDITURE/ GDP)



Source: SEP, main numbers of the National Education System 2018-2019.

As it has been mentioned throughout this report, the country will soon face a crisis in every sector of society as it hasn't been seen in decades, and, for the same reason, it will require actions according to meet the dimension and scope of this reality.

This scenario demands by itself redesigning the priorities that are in charge of the federal government. A redesigning of budgets to truly understand those in more need would imply to postpone projects such as the construction of the Dos Bocas refinery for 41,300 million pesos only for 2020 and the construction of the peninsular railway called Tren Maya at a cost of over 139 billion pesos for 2020.

Image:<https://www.portalpolitico.tv/nacionales/atrae-scjn-amparo-para-analizar-derecho-a-la-educacion-de-comunidades-indigenas>



## WHAT INFORMATION IS MISSING IN THIS SECTOR?

The success of every public policy is based on two main actions. The first one is to count on an accurate and thorough diagnosis of the origin of a certain public issue. Regularly, this diagnosis is based on the data analysis and indicators that allow the decision-makers to be more precise when generating a ruling. The second challenge is to count on the appropriate tools to solve such issues. These tools refer to a series of institutional capacities, from relying on a large and sufficient budget to have adequate staff and organization for the implementation and follow up of the programs. All of it requires relying on enough infrastructure and equipment.

In the area of education, Mexico has amplified and improved the statistics. This information, more detailed and analyzed every time, has allowed better-informed decision-making. The ENLACE tests (National Tests of Academic Achievement in School centers for its acronym in Spanish) and EXCALE (Quality and Academic Achievement Tests for its acronym in Spanish) are proof of this effort.

PLANEA (National Plan for the evaluation of Learning for its acronym in Spanish), born in 2013, keeps its intention to know the extent to which students achieve mastery of a set of key learnings in different stages of compulsory education, to offer truthful, trustworthy, and relevant for the decision-making in the area of education and education policies.<sup>6</sup>

In 2019, the federal government extinguished The National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE for its acronym in Spanish) the organization in charge of giving life and support to this important tool. With the disappearance of the INEE, the PLANEA test, applied by the institute, is under risk of disappearing as well: so far, the National Commission for the Continuous Improvement of Education (MEJOREDU for its acronym in Spanish) has not released any signs of wanting to rescue or implement the test. On the other hand, the SEP could continue with the census application for schools' internal use based on the test that the institute used to design itself.

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<sup>6</sup> 6 INEE, 2018, ¿qué hay de nuevo con PLANEA? Textos de divulgación.



If the application of the PLANEA test does not continue on behalf of the MEJOREDU, the opportunity of continuing to know the advance systematically on the key learnings established on the basic education curriculum would be lost. More specifically, the continuity of the PLANEA test relies on those who provide ideas and recommendations to:

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**The Federal and local education Authorities and decentralized agencies about the achievement of key learnings of students in compulsory education, as well as the existing gaps among different population groups, to contribute with the decisions of education policies.**

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**The general public, about the state of compulsory education in regards to what students can learn, as well as the learning differences among different groups of the school population.**

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**The teaching and directors team from school institutes and elementary and middle education centers about what is expected for the students to learn in the assessed areas, the level of learning achievement that they will reach, as well as the size of the challenge for teaching and learning that they will face.**

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## A reflection on this possible loss of information: How will decisions in educational matters be made to achieve progress and meet goals programmed in previous years?

To the gravity of the fact that a critical compass for the education system was lost, we would have to add the cost of losing an effort made by generations performed by teachers and experts of different thinking styles to measure the learnings in the country.

Equally important are the goals established in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals. On their goal #4, which refers to quality education, there are many goals with a 2030 due date.

The stalemate that the COVID-19 will leave in many sectors, including education, will force the national authorities to reconsider their commitments amid the goals projected for 2030. With poverty rates never seen in the world, with an economic recession similar to the one experienced 100 years ago and several affectations on issues such as hunger, health, and industrial development, among others. The original paths would have to be modified and create new alternatives to overcome the reality that is approaching us.

The challenge, in addition to complying with the international agreements to which Mexico has committed, is to continue generating and spreading accurate and quality information that can reach different international organizations.

Mexico has been an international reference for many years, in many sectors consequently, it will have to re-take many of its transparency principles and effectiveness to continue on an approachable track of credibility inside and outside the country.

## FINAL COMMENTS

The educational sector in Mexico requires urgently to take decisions to guide the strategies that should face the ravages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The way that governmental systems have been working, including the education sector, should reformulate themselves, improving the analysis and diagnosis of social issues, just as the response timeframe to implement more efficient, accurate, and transparent policy.

The effects of the pandemic will not only be reflected in the health and economy sectors, but they will also be all over the productivity and development areas. For this reason, the education sector will require a reckless voice to allow to unify and strengthen the SEN in the first place, to stay as a reference of information and problem solving, secondly, and to urgently bring attention to the country's most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

As has been seen, education issues are many and diverse. The way to approach them in this crisis caused by COVID-19 requires a thorough strategy that joins efforts and possible solutions.

It is the State's responsibility to grant quality education regardless of the social and geographical contexts, however, an equity approach should be favored over the most vulnerable populations, it is imperative to rely on better institutional coordination in all the levels of decision-making. Same as strengthening the information systems to contribute to improve the impact of the decision-making on the resolution of education problems, as well as to have a better assignation of resources in the budget next year.



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