This summary of main conclusions is drawn from *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Mexico*. The full report is available on the project’s website: [www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy](http://www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy).
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Executive summary

Student learning outcomes in Mexico are considerably below the OECD average. However, trend analyses of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results have shown some encouraging improvement in student learning outcomes, particularly in the area of mathematics. Despite the impressive expansion of the education system in the last few decades, educational attainment remains a challenge and the high share of students leaving the education system too early with low skills remains also a major problem. In addition, there are indications that student results are strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors. The role of evaluation and assessment as key tools to achieve quality and equity in education is reinforced by a range of policy initiatives. Mexico has recently introduced an extensive curricular reform to improve the coherence of the system and its focus on student achievement: the Comprehensive Reform of Basic Education (RIEB). Also, the federal government funds public education partly through targeted educational programmes, which typically include an important evaluation component. While there are provisions for evaluation and assessment at student, teacher, school and system levels, challenges remain in strengthening some of the components of the evaluation and assessment framework, in ensuring articulations within the framework to ensure consistency and complementarity, and in establishing improvement-oriented evaluation practices. The following priorities were identified for the development of evaluation and assessment policies in Mexico.

Sustaining efforts to strengthen evaluation and assessment and placing greater emphasis on their improvement function

Mexico has made a remarkable progress in developing the foundations of a framework for evaluation and assessment. As of the early 2000s, educational policy conferred a central strategic role to evaluation and assessment as indispensable tools for planning, accountability, and policy development. However, at the present time, there is no integrated evaluation and assessment framework – it is not perceived as a coherent whole and it does not visibly connect all the different components. Also, it is apparent that the policy initiatives in evaluation and assessment of the last few years have emphasised accountability over improvement. An important initial step for policy development is to develop a strategic plan or framework document that conceptualises a complete evaluation and assessment framework and articulates ways to achieve the coherence between its different components. A priority is to reinforce the improvement function of evaluation and assessment and reflect on the best ways for evaluation and assessment to improve student learning. Realising the full potential of the evaluation and assessment framework involves establishing strategies to strengthen the linkages to classroom practice, where the improvement of student learning takes place. This involves the reinforcement of the role of state educational authorities in developing structures to undertake school-level evaluation procedures and provide the necessary follow-up support to drive school improvement. A critical element in the effectiveness of the
evaluation and assessment framework is its proper alignment with the RIEB. Another challenge are the limited evaluation and assessment competencies throughout the education system in spite of the considerable national efforts to stimulate an evaluation culture, as well as providing some competency-building learning opportunities. Hence, an area for policy priority is consolidating efforts to improve the capacity for evaluation and assessment.

Drawing on the implementation of the curricular reform to broaden approaches to student assessment

Teachers in Mexico play an important role in student assessment, as both formative and summative assessment are an essential part of their professional responsibilities. However, teaching, learning and assessment still take place in a somewhat “traditional” setting with the teacher leading his/her classroom, the students typically not involved in the planning and organisation of lessons and assessment concentrating on summative scores. As a result, Mexico needs a stronger commitment to improving students’ achievement through the use of formative assessment to enhance student learning. In this context, the implementation of the RIEB is an opportunity as it is bringing a sound approach to classroom-based assessment. The RIEB expands the meaning of assessment, conceiving it as an essential part of teaching and learning; proposes the use of a wide range of assessment instruments; emphasises the formative purpose of classroom-based assessment; and introduces a critical shift in giving a new meaning to marks. Another concern is the dominance of ENLACE (National Assessment of Academic Achievement in Schools, a census-based standardised student assessment). While ENLACE was originally supposed to be a diagnostic and formative assessment instrument, the new objectives and consequences that were added subsequently led to some visible unintended effects such as teaching to the test. Hence, a major priority for policy should be the development of strategies to eliminate or at least reduce the current detrimental effects of ENLACE. Possible strategies are reducing the high stakes of ENLACE or transforming ENLACE into a tool for the external summative assessment of students, i.e., an external examination system. In addition, if student marking is to be aligned with the RIEB’s expected learning outcomes and standards in a consistent way across the country, then a priority is to establish mechanisms for the moderation of marking, both within and across schools.

Developing teaching standards, strengthening teacher appraisal for improvement and establishing teacher certification

Teacher appraisal is recognised as an important tool to improve student learning and is central in the overall evaluation and assessment framework. This is reflected in the very comprehensive approach to teacher appraisal in Mexico, with a multitude of schemes and programmes. Teacher appraisal is generally perceived positively as a regular component of teachers’ careers. However, teacher appraisal appears complex and fragmented. The overall system of teacher appraisal is the result of the accumulation of isolated programmes and initiatives which evolved independently of each other over time and does not come across as a coherent whole. Also, teacher appraisal, as it is currently conceived, does not emphasise the promotion of teacher improvement. It is predominantly a mechanism to award rewards to teachers mostly based on instruments
that only indirectly measure the quality of the teaching (ENLACE results and standardised teacher examinations). The use of raw ENLACE results in teacher appraisal also raises important issues of fairness across teachers and has the potential to generate detrimental effects in classroom practices. To address these challenges, it is proposed to develop a teacher appraisal model based on two main components: (i) Teacher appraisal for improvement with the introduction of a component predominantly dedicated to developmental evaluation, fully internal to the school, for which the school director would be held accountable, to be used for internal performance management, and to provide an assessment (only) of a qualitative nature to inform professional development plans; and (ii) Teacher appraisal for career progression as a model of certification of competencies for practice within and across career paths, to be associated with career advancement and to be based on a greater variety of instruments. This requires Mexico to establish a clear set of coherent teaching standards that signal to teachers and to society as a whole the core knowledge, skills and values associated with effective teaching at different stages of a teaching career.

Introducing a comprehensive and objective system of school evaluation

The notion of school evaluation is not well embedded in Mexican education principles and practices. Overall, key components of a successful policy development and implementation for school evaluation and improvement are missing from the approaches currently adopted in Mexico. A sustained meaningful system of external school evaluation is lacking. Currently, the external monitoring of schools is undertaken by the supervision system in place in the different states. However, the capacity of supervisors in general to engage in school evaluations in ways which may promote school improvement as well as resulting in accurate evaluation of the quality of a school’s work is limited under present conditions. The present system does not include qualitative aspects which are reliable and validated and which contribute to telling the full story of any school. Efforts at federal level have emphasised the development of materials for self-evaluation. They include advice, instruments and options for self-evaluation and for the construction and implementation of an effective school improvement plan as one of the outcomes of the self-evaluation process. However, the reality is that this work did not result in any sustained and consistent approach to self-evaluation across the country. In the longer term, Mexico should develop a comprehensive system of school evaluation. This would include at least the following elements: ensuring that national advice on self-evaluation penetrates the system; reinforcing the awareness of the rigour required to make self-evaluation lead to improvement; ensuring that all states recommend or require all schools to be involved in self-evaluation; promoting and encouraging states to have mechanisms through which they can engage in external evaluation of schools; and strengthening and broadening the role of supervisors as potential external evaluators. Another priority is to ensure that school directors have or develop the capacities to exercise instructional leadership in their schools.
Strengthening the use of system-level information and filling some data gaps in the national monitoring system

The monitoring of education system quality is a well-developed component of the Mexican approach to evaluation and assessment. There has been a lot of attention among policy makers and the civil society on developing indicators at the national and state levels in order to measure the quality and progress of the education system as a whole. This key focus on system evaluation is reflected in the establishment of comprehensive information systems and sample-based national assessments that have been continuously refined over the last decade. The key challenge, however, is to ensure that stakeholders across the system make effective use of the available data. System-level data are not well exploited to inform the development of policies. There seems to be limited capacity and/or interest at the state and national levels to engage in deeper analysis and interpretation of results. Another challenge is to facilitate the use of data by professionals at the school level. This calls for the development of strategies to optimise the use of existing system-level data by stakeholders across the system. Also, there are some areas where the collection of data should be further developed: individual student and teacher trajectories in the school system; the monitoring of inequities in learning outcomes between specific student groups; the socio-economic and demographic backgrounds of students; and the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the teaching and learning environment. Finally, EXCALE (Educational Quality and Achievement Tests, sample-based standardised student assessment for national monitoring) should be continuously reviewed to ensure their relevance to national education goals.
Conclusions and recommendations

Education system context

Student learning outcomes are below the OECD average but show some progress

Student learning outcomes in Mexico are considerably below the OECD average. In 2009, achievement levels of Mexican students in the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were statistically significantly below all other OECD countries in the assessed areas of reading literacy, mathematics and science. However, trend analyses of PISA results have shown some encouraging improvement in student learning outcomes, particularly in the area of mathematics. Despite the impressive expansion of the education system in the last few decades, educational attainment remains a challenge. It is the third lowest in the OECD area for the working-age population with 35% of 25-to-64-year-olds having attained at least upper secondary education in 2009 (against an OECD average of 73%). The high share of students leaving the education system too early with low skills remains also a major problem.

There are concerns about strong social inequities in the school system

There is evidence that student results are strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors. Research by the National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (INEE) on national student assessments in basic education shows that there is a strong and positive relationship between student performance and the family’s social-cultural conditions. This investigation concluded that: (i) there are enormous educational gaps between students within the same grade, which may reach the equivalent of over four schooling years; (ii) to a great extent such gaps are the product of social inequities, which are closely reproduced within the education system; and (iii) the socio-cultural conditions of students explain most of the variations in educational performance in Mexico.

A range of policy initiatives reinforce the role of evaluation and assessment

The role of evaluation and assessment as key tools to achieve quality and equity in education is reinforced by a range of policy initiatives. Mexico has recently introduced an extensive curricular reform to improve the coherence of the system and its focus on student achievement: the Comprehensive Reform of Basic Education (RIEB). The reform involves the preparation of updated study plans and programmes, focusing on pertinent teaching and...
with clearly defined expectations of skills to be acquired by grade and subject; improved training provided to school directors and teachers; and participative processes of school management. Also, the federal government funds public education partly through targeted educational programmes. These typically require an application by individual schools, involve additional resources for schools and include an important evaluation component. In addition, the Alliance for Quality in Education, a national pact on education signed in 2008 by the Presidency and the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) has helped to shape education policy since its creation, with initiatives addressing the modernisation of schools, the professionalisation of education agents, and educational evaluation.

Strengths and challenges

There is a range of initiatives to strengthen the evaluation and assessment framework which nonetheless remains incomplete and not integrated

Mexico has made a remarkable progress in developing the foundations of a framework for evaluation and assessment. As of the early 2000s, educational policy conferred a central strategic role to evaluation and assessment as indispensable tools for planning, accountability, and policy development. Milestones in the development of evaluation and assessment in Mexico were the creation of the National Institute for Educational Assessment and Evaluation (INEE) in 2002 and the implementation of national standardised assessments: on the basis of a sample (EXCALE in 2005) and census-based (ENLACE in 2006). Currently, evaluation and assessment remains a priority of educational policy. The 2007-2012 Education Sector Programme (PROSEDU) places evaluation and assessment as a transversal issue across all education objectives with three main functions: accountability of education agents; information to parents; and support for public policies. The centrality of evaluation and assessment in the education agenda has resulted in the recent development of a range of initiatives which have the potential to strengthen evaluation and assessment in the school system. However, at the present time, there is no integrated evaluation and assessment framework. As in other OECD countries, the different components of evaluation and assessment have developed independently of each other over time. There are provisions for student assessment, school evaluation, teacher appraisal and system evaluation, but these are not explicitly integrated or aligned. The existing framework is not perceived as a coherent whole and it does not connect all the different components.

There are common references at the national level but further work is needed to align with the Comprehensive Reform of Basic Education

There are common references to provide the basis for evaluation and assessment. At the system level, federal governments in office establish priorities for educational policy, which provide the framework for policy development. Education targets to be achieved by 2012 have also been established with associated indicators to permit the monitoring of their achievement. These are important references to shape the evaluation and assessment framework and inform, in particular, system evaluation. The General Education Law also provides clear aims for education emphasising the development of individuals and the
promotion of values and attitudes. At the level of student learning goals, there is a basis for common expectations of outcomes from schooling. In basic education, there is a national curriculum supported by the general 2011 Study Plan for basic education and the grade- and subject-specific 2011 Study Programmes. These have been revised as part of the Comprehensive Reform of Basic Education (RIEB), a wide-ranging reform with the potential to have long-lasting effects on student learning in Mexico. It puts emphasis on concepts such as assessment for learning, expected learning outcomes, collaborative learning, project-based work, student self-assessment and peer assessment and criterion-referenced marking, all of which place students at the centre of the learning. A crucial aspect to the successful implementation of the RIEB is its alignment to the evaluation and assessment framework, which is in its starting phase. While there has been progress in aligning ENLACE to the RIEB, there is a need to re-align EXCALE with the curricular standards proposed in the RIEB, develop teacher capacity to assess against RIEB’s student learning objectives, and ensure the development of teaching and school management standards aligned with the RIEB.

The governance of the evaluation and assessment framework raises some concerns

The distribution of responsibilities within the evaluation and assessment framework raises some concerns. First, even if the General Education Law clearly states that the evaluation of the education system is an exclusive responsibility of the SEP, in practice the division of labour between the SEP and INEE within the framework remains unclear. There is considerable overlap between the work of the two institutions, for instance on the development of education indicators, the production of annual reports on the state of education in Mexico, or on the development of a vision for school evaluation. While INEE has technical autonomy over its work, at the time of the visit by the OECD Review Team it remained politically and financially dependent on the SEP. However, 2012 revisions to the 2002 Presidential Decree which created the INEE make INEE’s autonomy more explicit and provide more independence from the SEP. Second, while states are required to implement federally-dictated evaluation and assessment policies and are allowed to develop complementary initiatives, they do not have clear domains of responsibility within the evaluation and assessment framework. This goes along with a deficit of structures for evaluation at the local level, in view of supporting schools’ work. Third, teacher appraisal, which benefits from a large share of the resources invested in the evaluation and assessment framework, is highly politicised and does not benefit from a co-ordinated management at the national level.

There is a narrow conception of evaluation and assessment and room to strengthen its improvement function

There is a narrow understanding of the purposes and the potential of evaluation and assessment. Evaluation and assessment are still perceived mostly as instruments to hold stakeholders accountable, to “control” and assess compliance with regulations. This is visible at all levels with the focus often being whether formal requirements are met with less attention given to the quality of practices or ways for these to improve. For instance, supervision structures within states emphasise administrative rather than pedagogical aspects of schools, student assessment remains focussed on summative results and teacher appraisal mostly aims at salary progression and monetary rewards. The idea that the
ultimate objective of evaluation and assessment is to improve students’ learning and teachers’ teaching is not yet fully matured in the Mexican evaluation and assessment framework. Also, evaluation and assessment in Mexico is to a great extent conceived as “measurement”. This reflects the dominance of ENLACE in the evaluation and assessment framework. In addition to the primary role for which it was conceived, the formative assessment of students, ENLACE results constitute the dominant instrument in in-service teacher appraisal, the central factor in school accountability (through the publication of results at the school level), and the de facto key element in the evaluation of the national education system and the state education sub-systems. Overall, it is apparent that the policy initiatives in evaluation and assessment of the last few years have emphasised accountability over improvement.

There is strong capacity at the national level but also a need to strengthen competencies for evaluation and assessment across the system

The capacity for evaluation and assessment at the federal level is impressive. Millions of student assessments and teacher examinations are processed every year requiring a large logistical capacity and high levels of technical expertise. This is the result of considerable technical expertise accumulated in an institution such as the National Assessment Centre for Higher Education (CENEVAL), top methodological guidance from INEE, and strong policy and implementation capacity within the SEP. Areas such as educational measurement, psychometrics, test development, validation of test items or scaling methods are fairly well developed in Mexico. However, while there have been considerable national efforts to stimulate an evaluation culture by strengthening assessment and evaluation activities, there are still limited evaluation and assessment competencies throughout the education system. Competencies for evaluation and assessment at the state and local levels remain limited. Moreover, school supervision structures within states remain mostly focused on administrative tasks rather than engaging in a dialogue with individual schools around pedagogical aspects. There is great variation in the capacity of supervisors, heads of teaching, and heads of sector to effectively engage in quality assurance practices and provide support to schools. There is also a need to improve the competencies of school leaders in evaluation and assessment, in particular with regard to ensuring a meaningful school self-evaluation process, and providing pedagogical guidance and coaching to individual teachers. Other areas in which building capacity is a considerable challenge include: the competencies of teachers for student assessment (both formative and summative); the data handling skills of school agents (e.g. to use ENLACE results); and analytical capacity for educational planning and policy development at the system level.

Assessment is seen as part of the professional role of teachers but approaches to learning and assessment remain markedly traditional

Teachers in Mexico play an important role in student assessment, as both formative continuous assessment and summative assessment are an essential part of their professional responsibilities. Assessment in Mexico is integral to the work of teachers. Evidence on student learning is collected regularly and a variety of aspects are taken into account for student assessment: tasks, effort, presentations, tests, projects. However,
teaching, learning and assessment still take place in a somewhat “traditional” setting with the teacher leading his/her classroom, the students typically not involved in the planning and organisation of lessons and assessment concentrating on summative scores.

The curricular reform has much potential to improve student assessment practices

The RIEB is bringing into the education scene a sound approach to classroom-based assessment. By unifying curricular efforts around expected learning outcomes, the RIEB is generating a positive move from a content-based curriculum to a competencies-oriented one. This constitutes an important step forward for Mexico. The RIEB includes a clear and interesting approach to student assessment in the classroom, for both formative and summative purposes. It expands the meaning of assessment, conceiving it as an essential part of teaching and learning; proposes the use of a wide range of assessment instruments; emphasises the formative purpose of classroom-based assessment; and introduces a critical shift in giving a new meaning to marks. The RIEB intends to respond to a range of current challenges in student assessment. Teachers seem to have a narrow understanding of formative assessment. Giving feedback to students is conceived as giving them marks or points for a task, telling students whether their work was acceptable or not, or asking them to revise their work or make extra effort. Also, marking practices lack pedagogical significance. Marking in Mexico consists of assigning points to students across a range of tasks and behaviours and then averaging them to obtain a mark. Points for students’ work are assigned in a normative way, by comparing students within classes and giving the greatest number of points to the “best” student, regardless of whether or not the standards are indeed excellent. At present there is also a need to improve the instruments for reporting marks.

ENLACE has too many objectives and a number of unintended effects on school practices

While ENLACE was originally supposed to be a diagnostic and formative assessment instrument, new objectives and consequences were added subsequently, the most important of which is the use of its results to hold schools accountable and provide monetary incentives to teachers and school directors. ENLACE has brought considerable benefits such as further teacher concentration on student achievement, particularly that of underperforming students, or greater awareness of the importance of reading comprehension. But detrimental effects of ENLACE are also visible in the Mexican school system. Teaching to the test has become a widely spread pedagogical practice. School directors, teachers and students consider that practising standardised assessments is the best strategy for improving student achievement. Important educational objectives, which are not assessed in ENLACE, are neglected. As standardised tests cover a limited range of competencies and cross-curricular skills, teaching to the test narrows students’ learning experiences. Also, a major problem in external student assessment in Mexico is the almost exclusive use of multiple-choice tests, with potential distortionary effects on the education of children.
**There is limited consistency of student assessment across schools and classes**

Schools have no explicit marking criteria and typically do not have documentation on their approaches to student assessment. This fact, together with the absence of moderation procedures for aligning the meaning of teachers’ marks, leads to a situation in which the meaning of marks differs from one region to another, from one school to the next and even from one classroom to another classroom within the same school and from one student to another within the same classroom.

**There is a general consensus about the need for teacher appraisal but the overall framework is complex and fragmented**

Teacher appraisal is recognised as an important tool to improve student learning and is central in the overall evaluation and assessment framework. This is reflected in the very comprehensive approach to teacher appraisal in Mexico, with a multitude of schemes and programmes. Teacher appraisal is generally perceived positively as a regular component of teachers’ careers. Teachers are not defensive against teacher appraisal and seem generally open to external feedback from a trusted source. However, teacher appraisal appears complex and fragmented. The overall system of teacher appraisal is the result of the accumulation of isolated programmes and initiatives which evolved independently of each other over time and does not come across as a coherent whole. Given the multitude of instruments and appraisal components, teachers do not receive consistent and clear signals about what they should be doing to be a “good teacher”. There also come gaps in the teacher appraisal framework. A major one, once the teacher is in the profession, is that teacher appraisal is not mandatory and therefore a good proportion of teachers do not undergo any performance appraisal. This is now being addressed through the implementation of the Universal Evaluation System. Also, appraisal for in-service teachers who prefer to remain in the classroom is limited to schemes for salary progression (National Teacher Career Programme, PNCM) and financial stimuli (Incentives Programme for Teacher Quality). As a result, there is no formal teacher appraisal which focuses on teacher development and feedback for the improvement of practices. Informal feedback for improvement is also undertaken at the school level (through school management and supervisors) but there is no external formal validation of such practices.

**The introduction of the National Teaching Post Competition provides greater transparency to teacher recruitment**

A major positive development has been the introduction of the National Teaching Post Competition, in an initial stage through the National Examination of Teaching Knowledge and Skills (ENCHD). This competition accomplishes two major functions: (i) it brings more transparency to the teacher recruitment process, significantly reducing the number of teaching posts allocated on an improper basis; and (ii) it identifies teachers weakly prepared by initial teacher education programmes.
There is currently no shared understanding of what constitutes high quality teaching but there are efforts to develop teaching standards

Even though there have been recent significant efforts to develop teaching standards in Mexico, these have not yet produced visible results and the education system currently still lacks a national framework defining standards for the teaching profession. Hence, at the moment, there is no clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. At the national level, there are no uniform performance criteria or reference frameworks against which teachers are appraised.

The improvement of teaching quality is not at the centre of teacher appraisal

A challenge for Mexico is that currently in-service teacher appraisal is predominantly a mechanism to award rewards to teachers mostly based on instruments (ENLACE results and standardised teacher examinations) that only indirectly measure the quality of the teaching. Teacher appraisal, as it is currently conceived, does not emphasise the promotion of teacher improvement. Teachers receive little feedback or advice for the improvement of their practices. There is not enough focus on strategies for promoting improvements in the quality of teaching as a consequence of teacher appraisal. Also, it appears that in general there are few consequences of negative teacher appraisals. This means that even when teachers are identified as lower-performing, there is little pressure or incentive for them to actively work on improvement.

The use of student standardised assessments in teacher appraisal raises a range of concerns

In Mexico, ENLACE results function as the dominant instrument in the formal appraisal of in-service teachers. Stimuli in the Incentives Programme are based on ENLACE and in both the PNCM and the Universal Evaluation System, ENLACE accounts for 50% of the teacher’s “score”. In spite of its attractiveness, using student standardised test scores as an instrument for teacher appraisal is faced with numerous challenges. First, student learning is influenced by many factors. ENLACE scores carry much more than the impact of the appraised teacher and also reflect, for instance, the impact of the student’s family, the student’s previous learning or the resources of the school. Second, standardised assessments used to differentiate students are not specifically designed for the purpose of appraising teachers. In Mexico, student standardised assessment scores have not been validated as a measure of teachers’ performance. Third, teaching impact on students is not restricted to areas assessed through student standardised assessments – generally limited to reading and numeracy – but also include transfer of psychological, civic and lifelong learning skills. In addition, the use of student standardised assessments to appraise individual teachers has potential detrimental effects. For example, teaching to the test is extensive in Mexican schools. The disproportionate focus on ENLACE runs the risk of ENLACE becoming the national curriculum, when ENLACE only measures achievement in a subset of learning objectives in Spanish and mathematics. Finally, current in-service teacher appraisal processes do not grant equal opportunities for teachers to secure the associated rewards. Appraising teachers using raw ENLACE results puts at a considerable disadvantage those teachers.
working in more difficult circumstances. Teachers not “covered” by ENLACE are also excluded from the individual stimuli component of the Incentives Programme.

**Teacher appraisal is not embedded in a clearly defined teacher career structure**

In Mexico, there is no career path for effective teachers. Promotion through the Vertical Promotion System consists only of advancement into a school management role, requiring the teacher to leave the classroom. In turn, the PNCM consists essentially of a salary progression which does not come with greater responsibilities or new roles within the school. Hence, within a teaching role there are few opportunities for promotion, greater recognition and more responsibility. There are no career steps in teacher development (e.g. beginning; classroom teacher; experienced teacher), which would permit a better match between teacher competence and skills and the tasks to be performed at schools.

**School leaders and state educational authorities play little role in teacher appraisal**

Teacher appraisal in Mexico does not provide school directors with leverage to lead the core business of teaching and learning in their school. School leaders currently play no role in formal in-service teacher appraisal. Only in the Vertical Promotion System are they involved in appraising the aptitude, discipline and punctuality of candidates to school management posts. Clearly, the teacher appraisal system is not designed in a way as to encourage pedagogical leadership by school leaders. Moreover, state educational authorities as well as their supervision structures play no significant role in formal in-service teacher appraisal. This is surprising in light of the fact that state educational authorities are the employers of the teachers. This translates into an unsuitable separation between the management of the teaching body (by state educational authorities) and the system for its appraisal and rewards (by the federal educational authorities).

**There is no permeating culture of school evaluation and a comprehensive system is lacking**

The notion of school evaluation is not well embedded in Mexican education principles and practices. On the contrary, it appears that attempts to introduce evaluation in this context have had first to counter strong feelings of apprehension and wariness among teachers and school directors. Evaluation or inspection has been associated with negativity and censure, not with improvement. This pronounced conceptual belief has detracted from efforts at federal level to introduce a system of school evaluation and may have resulted in an over-reliance in the power of weakly supported self-evaluation to effect change. The key challenge for Mexico is to develop a comprehensive system of school evaluation. Overall, key components of a successful policy development and implementation for school evaluation and improvement are missing from the approaches currently adopted in Mexico. A sustained meaningful system of external school evaluation is lacking. Currently, the external monitoring of schools is undertaken by the supervision system in place in the different states. However, this system does not constitute an authentic approach to external school evaluation. Supervisors may or may not have an educational background and may play one or more of a number of roles. The
capacity of supervisors in general to engage in school evaluations in ways which may promote school improvement as well as resulting in accurate evaluation of the quality of a school’s work is limited under present conditions. The present system does not include qualitative aspects which are reliable and validated and which contribute to telling the full story of any school. Without external evaluation, there is a danger that judgements of school quality will be made on the basis of very narrow information.

**School self-evaluation is well supported at federal level but practices remain incipient**

Over the last 10-15 years there has been considerable focus on school self-evaluation as one way of drawing attention to quality and promoting improvement. Mexico has shown itself open to outside influences and there has been good research on systems and practices in other countries relating to self-evaluation. The materials produced in support of self-evaluation at school level are detailed, comprehensive and of good quality. They include advice, instruments and options for self-evaluation and for the construction and implementation of an effective school improvement plan as one of the outcomes of the self-evaluation process. However, the challenge for Mexico is to ensure that these useful materials are well understood, are used consistently in all schools, have sustained and significant impact and play a broader role in use by personnel for external school evaluation. The reality is that this work did not result in any sustained and consistent approach to self-evaluation across the country.

**There is a current lack of reporting on qualitative aspects of schools’ work and student outcomes at the school level are not contextualised**

A clear challenge for the Mexican system is to find effective ways of reporting on the quality of education at all levels. There is a current lack of reporting on qualitative aspects of the work of individual schools for parents and other stakeholders. There is as yet no way of reporting on the quality of educational processes and in general interpreting the quantitative data in ways which provide a fuller picture presenting the actual quality of education at school level. The data which became publicly available through the National Student, Teacher and School Registry (RNAME) represent an undoubted advance in reporting on the quality of outcomes in individual schools. However, without more sophisticated quantitative analyses or a qualitative element to place alongside the data, there is the risk of simplistic interpretation of what constitutes quality at school level, arising from an incomplete narrative telling the “story” of the school in its particular context and circumstances. Another concern relates to making fair comparisons of student outcomes across schools. At the moment, raw averages of ENLACE assessment results are published at the school level, inevitably leading the media to publish school rankings which do not take account of schools’ specific circumstances. This can considerably distort considerations about the effectiveness of each school as raw results do not reflect the value added by schools to student results.
The work of school directors is too focused on administrative tasks and their appraisal is inadequate

Administration of school services such as ensuring safe infrastructure and compliance with legislation appears to be the actual focus of school directors’ work. While such aspects are important for the context of learning and for a certain type of accountability, they leave little time for school directors to focus on aspects which have a greater effect on quality. In addition, the quality of their work once appointed is generally evaluated through their voluntary participation in the National Teacher Career Programme (PNCM). Within that context, directors are appraised through a section of test items relating specifically to school management. Such a system may allow authorities to gain a view of some directors’ knowledge of law and theories of management. However, it could not come close to showing levels of those types of leadership qualities required to engage the school in effective school self-evaluation, drive improvement in key processes such as learning and teaching, and galvanise parents and the locality to be part of the learning community.

System evaluation is a priority but there is room to strengthen the use of system-level information

The monitoring of education system quality is a well-developed component of the Mexican approach to evaluation and assessment. There has been a lot of attention among policy makers and the civil society on developing indicators at the national and state levels in order to measure the quality and progress of the education system as a whole. This key focus on system evaluation is reflected in the establishment of comprehensive information systems and sample-based national assessments that have been continuously refined over the last decade. There is wide acceptance of the principle that education policies and programmes should be continuously monitored and evaluated in order to inform future policy development and educational planning. The key challenge, however, is to ensure that stakeholders across the system make effective use of the available data. System-level data are not well exploited to inform the development of policies. Currently, most focus nationally is on the collection of data and the operation of assessments, with less attention paid to how such results could be used to determine priorities and inform strategies. There seems to be limited capacity and/or interest at the state and national levels to engage in deeper analysis and interpretation of results. Another challenge is to facilitate the use of data by professionals at the school level. Given Mexico’s strong centralised tradition, the flow of data in the system goes mostly into one direction, from the schools towards higher levels of the educational administration, but there is limited interaction and feedback for schools regarding the information they provide.

A comprehensive national statistics and registry system is well established but some data gaps remain in the national monitoring system

A key strength of Mexico’s approach to system evaluation is its focus on building a comprehensive national statistics and indicators system. There are major efforts to collect data on education performance and the various factors influencing it, to monitor trends over time and analyse the state of the education system. In recent years, there has been
strong focus on integrating information from a range of different sources and databases so as to improve the accuracy and usefulness of information for analysis and decision-making. The most recent policy initiative to strengthen information systems has been the development of the National Student, Teacher and School Registry (RNAME), which has great potential to contribute to improving transparency and accountability of the education system. However, there are some areas where the collection of data should be further developed. Keeping track of individual student and teacher trajectories remains an important challenge in Mexico, although RNAME will go a long way to addressing this challenge. More attention could also be paid to systematically reporting on inequities in the learning outcomes of different student groups, e.g. students from different socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds. Another data gap concerns the measurement of the school socio-economic context. Finally, not much information is available on broader aspects of education quality, such as student attitudes, motivation and well-being and the overall teaching and learning environment in schools.

EXCALE provides system-wide information on student learning outcomes. The primary purpose is to obtain and analyse information on student learning outcomes so as to monitor the progress of the national education system and state sub-systems and to provide information to improve education policy and practice. Several elements make EXCALE particularly well suited for this purpose. First, EXCALE is referenced to the Mexican curriculum, and as such it allows to measure progress towards national education goals and to broaden the national debate beyond results in international surveys. Second, EXCALE’s matrix design allows for a wider range of knowledge and skills to be tested without overburdening individual students. Third, EXCALE not only measures outcomes but also gathers information on the characteristics of students and on factors that may contribute to explaining their results. However, further improvements are needed to secure the relevance of EXCALE. Key challenges are to ensure that EXCALE: adequately reflects the new expected learning outcomes and curriculum standards proposed by the RIEB; is made more inclusive for cultural and linguistic minorities; and is not threatened as the key instrument for system monitoring by the disproportionate attention paid to ENLACE results at all levels of the system.

Policy recommendations

The national policies for evaluation and assessment should hold a steady course, accommodating well-founded concerns, and making the adjustments necessary so evaluation and assessment becomes a meaningful and valuable exercise in schools and classrooms. The current evaluation and assessment framework provides a good basis for further development. It is comprehensive, includes most domains of evaluation and assessment, a wide range of sources of data, and it generates useful results for policy development. However, some adjustments are needed to consolidate the meaningfulness of evaluation and assessment in the Mexican school system. A priority is to reinforce the
improvement function of evaluation and assessment and reflect on the best ways for evaluation and assessment to improve student learning. Realising the full potential of the evaluation and assessment framework involves establishing strategies to strengthen the linkages to classroom practice, where the improvement of student learning takes place. This involves the reinforcement of the role of state educational authorities in developing structures to undertake school-level evaluation procedures and provide the necessary follow-up support to drive school improvement. The articulation of evaluation and assessment at the local level is essential to establish links between national level policies and the improvement of classroom practices. A critical element in the effectiveness of the evaluation and assessment framework is its proper alignment with the RIEB. The RIEB calls for a greater emphasis on the improvement function of evaluation and assessment, which requires significant re-orientations of most of the components of the evaluation and assessment framework. This includes more attention to student formative assessment, greater emphasis on self-reflection for all the school agents, greater focus on continuous improvement in teacher appraisal, and better use of results for feedback.

Integrate the evaluation and assessment framework

The full potential of evaluation and assessment will not be realised until the framework is fully integrated and is perceived as a coherent whole. An important initial step is to develop a strategic plan or framework document that conceptualises a complete evaluation and assessment framework and articulates ways to achieve the coherence between its different components. The different levels of education governance should be engaged, in particular state educational authorities so their responsibilities and roles in the framework are clearly established. The plan should essentially constitute a common framework of reference for educational evaluation across the country with the ultimate objective of embedding evaluation as an on-going and essential part of the professionalism of the actors in the education system. The plan should establish a clear rationale for evaluation and assessment and a compelling narrative about how evaluation and assessment align with the different elements in the education reform programme. It should describe how each component of the evaluation and assessment framework can produce results that are useful for classroom practice and school improvement activities. The plan should include strategies to both strengthen some of the components of the evaluation and assessment framework and to develop articulations across the components.

Adjust the governance of the evaluation and assessment framework

The governance of the evaluation and assessment framework could benefit from a few significant adjustments. This would be in a context where the SEP retains the leadership in setting educational strategy and developing educational policy and maintains a role in the implementation of all the components of the evaluation and assessment framework. A first adjustment recommended is the considerable expansion of the autonomy of INEE so it can take the leadership in evaluation and assessment activities in the country. The objective would be to establish INEE as the authoritative voice in evaluation and assessment in Mexico, highly credible for its expertise and technical capacity, and issuing directions for the implementation of evaluation and assessment procedures in the country. Considerable progress was made in this direction on 16 May 2012 through the revision to the 2002 Presidential Decree which created the
INEE. The revisions, which will take effect in September 2012, reinforce INEE’s autonomy, strengthen its technical expertise, and provide further independence from the SEP. A second major adjustment involves requiring (or giving strong incentives for) state educational authorities to establish structures to formally organise external school evaluation, supervise school self-evaluation, and validate school-based approaches to teacher appraisal. This could be done through the establishment of agencies (or institutes) with responsibility for school supervision and improvement. A third adjustment is to ensure a better co-ordination of the teaching profession. This could be achieved through the creation of an independent body at the federal level to co-ordinate efforts in the management and improvement of the teaching workforce in the country.

**Significantly invest in evaluation and assessment capacity development across the school system**

As the evaluation and assessment framework develops and gains coherence, an area for policy priority is consolidating efforts to improve the capacity for evaluation and assessment. A priority is to improve the competencies for evaluation of state educational authorities and staff in their supervision structures (supervisors, heads of teaching, heads of sector). There is also a need to reinforce the educational leadership skills of school principals as their role in Mexico still retains a more traditional focus on administrative tasks. 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 RIEB, including promoting collaborative work among teachers around student summative assessment; and improving the capacity to collect and analyse information for self-improvement.

**Ensure a coherent and comprehensive strategy for the implementation of the curricular reform**

In the present context the improvement of classroom-based assessment in Mexico needs to be developed alongside the implementation of the RIEB, given the inclusion of relevant initiatives related to both formative and summative assessment. Additionally, the implementation and impact of the RIEB crucially depend on the successful introduction of changes in student assessment practices and on aligning these with the expected learning outcomes and standards defined in the new curriculum. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that the breadth of the curriculum and learning goals established in the new Study Plan is maintained in student assessment by making sure that all subject areas and objectives are given certain forms of attention. This involves not only classroom-based assessment, but also external assessments. As for classroom-based assessment, teachers need to integrate in their practices a much broader range of activities and instruments, to promote and capture more complex cognitive processes. Teachers should receive support and training to move from a rather traditional view of teaching, conceived as explaining themes and concepts, towards a broader concept based on the facilitation of learning and the development of competencies. In this context, the repertoire of approaches to learning and assessment needs to be expanded, moving away from assigning lots of exercises and practising tests. Also, if student marking is to be
aligned with the RIEB’s expected learning outcomes and standards in a consistent way across the country, then a priority is to establish mechanisms for the moderation of marking, both within and across schools.

**Develop strategies to address the detrimental effects of ENLACE**

A major priority for policy should be the development of strategies to eliminate or at the very least reduce the current detrimental effects of ENLACE, an effort to be informed by an in-depth study of the impact of ENLACE on practices in schools and classrooms. One strategy could be reducing the high stakes of ENLACE. A range of options are possible. A possibility is to rethink the objectives of ENLACE, including a return to the original motivation of ENLACE as a purely diagnostic and formative tool for student assessment. Another possibility is to add to this original objective some role in system evaluation to assess whether, at the national level, student learning objectives in the subjects covered by ENLACE are achieved or not. If the objective of using ENLACE for school accountability (publication of ENLACE results at the school level) and teacher appraisal is maintained, then it is imperative to develop value-added techniques to capture the real impact of individual schools and considerably reduce the weight of ENLACE results in teacher appraisal. Another strategy is to transform ENLACE into a tool for the external summative assessment of students, i.e. an external examination system. This would involve extending the range of student learning objectives assessed by including more subjects and broadening the range of tasks assessed. It would also have consequences for students, as with the contribution to final marks or as a certification mechanism at the end of key stages in education (such as end of educational cycles).

**Promote the formative use of standardised student assessments**

A policy priority should be to promote the adequate formative use of standardised student assessments such as ENLACE and PISA, including getting away from the incentives given to schools to practise the tests. Also, there should be a reflection about improving the timeliness of results’ delivery so they can inform learning strategies in the same school year ENLACE is taken. In the case of PISA, authorities should focus teachers’ attention on understanding its framework – what PISA assesses – and on reflecting and discussing how to develop the assessed competencies in the classroom.

**Consolidate teacher appraisal with the development of a medium-term vision**

Mexico has undertaken significant efforts to implement teacher appraisal and develop an evaluation culture among the teaching workforce. Placing teacher appraisal at the core of school reforms achieved a large consensus among the teaching profession that meaningful teacher appraisal is indispensable. Although the development of teacher appraisal is at an early stage and is only partially successful, it is important not to lose the ground that has been gained. Recognising the achievements to date, including the Universal Evaluation System which seeks to cover all teachers in the system and proposes a new formative emphasis to teacher appraisal, Mexico needs to develop a medium-term vision for teacher appraisal. The approach to teacher appraisal which holds greatest
promise of sustained high impact on student learning is one where teachers engage in reflective practice, study their own practices, and share their experience with their peers as a routine part of professional life.

**Implement teaching standards to guide teacher appraisal and professional development**

Mexico needs to have a basic reference of what good teaching means. This involves establishing a clear set of coherent teaching standards that signal to teachers and to society as a whole the core knowledge, skills and values associated with effective teaching at different stages of a teaching career. The teaching standards should be developed in a way as to provide a common basis to guide key elements of the teaching profession such as initial teacher education, teacher professional development, career advancement and, of course, teacher appraisal (including the alignment of its different components). Clear, well-structured and widely supported professional standards for teachers can be a powerful mechanism for aligning the various elements involved in developing teachers’ competencies.

**Aim for a greater balance in the long term between the summative and formative functions of teacher appraisal**

There needs to be a stronger emphasis on teacher appraisal for improvement purposes (i.e. developmental appraisal). Given that there are risks that the improvement function is hampered by high-stakes teacher appraisal, it is proposed that a component predominantly dedicated to developmental appraisal, fully internal to the school, be created. This development appraisal would have as its main purpose the continuous improvement of teaching practices in the school. It would be an internal process carried out by line managers, senior peers, and the school management. The main outcome would be feedback on teaching performance which would lead to a plan for professional development. In order to guarantee the systematic and coherent application of developmental evaluation across Mexican schools, it would be important to undertake the external validation of the respective school processes. Alongside developmental appraisal, the summative function of teacher appraisal that is currently being achieved through the PNCM, the Universal Evaluation System and the principles of the Vertical Promotion System (in the sense of career stages within teaching) could be brought together into a single process of teacher appraisal for career progression through a certification process associated with a teacher career structure to be created (with progression within career paths and access to distinct career paths). This would formalise the principle of advancement on merit associated with career opportunities for effective teachers bringing together both vertical and horizontal promotions. Each permanent teacher in the system would be required to periodically (say every four years) be the subject of a formal appraisal for certification (or re-certification). The purpose would be to certify teachers periodically as fit for the profession. Both developmental appraisal and appraisal for certification should reduce the weight of student standardised assessment results and rely on a greater variety of instruments, including classroom observation and the preparation of a portfolio.
Ensure states are actively engaged in teacher appraisal and give a more prominent role to school leaders

A move towards a greater emphasis on the improvement (or developmental) function of teacher appraisal inevitably requires a greater involvement of state educational authorities in teacher appraisal processes. Reflecting their responsibilities for the employment of teachers, state educational authorities should take the lead in organising teacher appraisal processes. This should be done in the context of a national framework with guidance, support and co-ordination from federal-level authorities. Also, effective operation of teacher appraisal and its contribution to school development will depend to a great extent on the pedagogical leadership of school directors. Teacher appraisal will only succeed in raising educational standards if school directors take direct responsibility for exerting pedagogical leadership and for assuming the quality of education in their schools. Hence, it is vital that school directors (and other members of the school management team) play a role in teacher appraisal.

Develop a long-term plan and take action to introduce a comprehensive and objective system of school evaluation

Longer-term planning should include the aim of the introduction of a comprehensive system of school evaluation. This involves taking the positive individual elements which already exist and developing them into a fully-rounded model of school evaluation, with all the necessary components. These would include at least the following elements: ensuring that national advice on self-evaluation penetrates the system and promotes the involvement of all schools; reinforcing the awareness not only of self-evaluation processes but of the rigour required to make self-evaluation lead to improvement; ensuring that all states recommend or require all schools to be involved in self-evaluation; promoting and encouraging states to have mechanisms through which they can engage in external evaluation of schools using transparent and known criteria; and strengthening and broadening the role of supervisors as potential external evaluators – to play a key role in school evaluation and thereby support improvement at classroom and school levels. In this context, consideration should be given by all states to the creation of an agency for school evaluation, perhaps attached to state evaluation institutes where such are in existence. These state agencies would be responsible for planning and undertaking external evaluations, validating self-evaluation, spreading good practice and offering suggestions for required areas of staff development of teachers, school directors and the supervisors themselves, resulting from analyses of evaluations conducted.

Shift the focus of school directors’ work towards learning and improvement and develop a detached system of school leadership appraisal

An important priority is to ensure that school directors have or develop the capacities to fulfil such a role. Ways will have to be found to release them from excessive burdens of administrative work, allowing them to focus more on students, teachers and learning. This implies the development of leadership training programmes, involving such components as in-school practical projects, self-evaluation support and action research, mentoring or coaching from successful school directors and the reduction of non-
productive work or administrative work which could be better undertaken by professional administrators. Also, appraisal of the work of school directors should be separated out from teacher appraisal and should include evaluation of appropriate subsets of the standards, including such aspects as staff teamwork, learning and teaching improvements, improvements in student outcomes at school level, the quality of partnership with parents and the community and overall school ethos, none of which can be evaluated effectively through written test or interview.

**Report on the quality of schools in ways which are supportive but have impact for schools and for policy makers at state and federal levels**

A comprehensive reporting system should be another longer-term goal. A number of components are necessary, including: school-level evaluation processes supported by supervisors with appropriate capacities to support and challenge school self-evaluation; school annual reports and summary improvement plans published and available to all parents; information on self-evaluation validated by supervisors through external evaluation, within an individual school report; school reports aggregated into a local-level report with common strengths and aspects which need to be developed; at state level validation of local reports by a quality agency or appropriate personnel and aggregation to produce a report on the quality of education at state level; and state-level data aggregated at federal level by appropriate personnel or agencies, such as INEE, to produce a national report on the quality of education, with recommendations for action at national and state levels.

**Expand the school information system and make more meaningful comparisons across schools**

Steps should be taken to develop additional effective ways of using school-level statistical data already available by expanding the schools information system (RNAME). Developments could include, alongside the existing raw test scores in ENLACE, quantitative data such as comparison of an individual school’s outcomes with the averages achieved by schools with similar characteristics. In addition, a measure of value-added for individual students across grades in primary and from the end of primary through to the end of basic education schooling at lower secondary would provide a meaningful narrative to data. There should also be a long-term aim to include some qualitative aspects in the reports on individual schools, or a link to a report from a school’s external evaluation. Also, improving the data on the students’ socio-economic background and developing the associated indicators at the school level would permit a more meaningful comparison of student results for “similar” groups of schools (schools with students from similar backgrounds).

**Optimise the reporting and use of system-level data to inform policy and practice**

National education authorities together with INEE should devise a strategy to optimise the use of existing system-level data by stakeholders across the system. A priority should be on further improving the use of system-level information for educational planning and policy development. While, indeed, large amounts of system-
level information exist in Mexico, the key focus in the coming years should be on drawing from this information to develop strategies for the improvement of education at the state and national level. Further steps could also be taken to communicate results from the national monitoring system more effectively to encourage their use by different stakeholders. It is essential that schools are not merely seen as data providers but that they become part of a collaborative process of data sharing and analysis. The SEP in collaboration with INEE should explore ways of presenting analyses in user-friendly ways, designing interfaces and presentational approaches which give non-technical users help with the interpretation and use of specific analyses.

**Respond to information gaps in the national monitoring system**

A focus should be on reviewing gaps within the current data collection system and developing a medium- and long-term strategy to improve data collection and measurement tools to respond to remaining information needs. Areas where collecting further information would help improve system monitoring are: individual student and teacher trajectories in the school system; the monitoring of inequities in learning outcomes between specific student groups; the socio-economic and demographic backgrounds of students; and the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the teaching and learning environment.

**Continuously review EXCALE and ensure its relevance in relation to national education goals**

It would be important to review the EXCALE assessments in relation to their alignment with the new curriculum requirements to ensure that the assessments stay relevant for system evaluation and longitudinal monitoring of results. In addition, it is important to review the responsiveness of EXCALE to different linguistic and cultural groups in Mexico and ensure EXCALE is made more inclusive by developing special adaptations for students with special needs. There is also scope to make greater use of EXCALE to monitor the progress of the Mexican education system towards achieving its equity objectives. To this end, INEE should consider to systematically report disaggregated results for relevant groups of students, such as Indigenous students, students with a migrant background and students from different socio-economic backgrounds.