

SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

REGIONAL EDUCATION INDICATORS PROJECT (PRIE)

EDUCATIONAL PANORAMA 2005: PROGRESSING TOWARD THE GOALS

Conclusions

This document has utilized a basic set of internationally comparable indicators to illustrate the state of education in Summit of the Americas countries. The description has focused principally on the education goals adopted by the Summit. Based on the presentation we offer three basic categories of conclusions.

The first is linked directly to the situation of countries in regard to the education goals of the Summit of the Americas. Here it is possible to state the following:

- Although countries have made significant efforts in recent years and the levels of progress are in a group of cases very impressive, few countries show a particularly auspicious situation in regard to achieving the Summit of the Americas education goals. If they do not make substantially greater policy efforts, a very large number of children and young people in these countries will not enjoy the rights that the Summit goals recognize.
- Universal completion of primary education is one of the goals that, in general is near to being accomplished. However, in 18 countries almost 6 million youths from 15 to 19 years of age have not completed that level. If more efforts are not made, in only four countries in the region will 95% of the population of exit age from primary education have completed that level by the year 2010. That is, only these four countries will have decidedly approached the goal. Even in these cases, specific efforts must be made in order to reach groups of people who do not have this right assured.
- Guaranteeing quality primary education is a great challenge. First, it is important to gain a broader understanding of this phenomenon in order that the different dimensions that comprise quality educational services be taken into account in the light of the challenges faced by education systems in this century. Observations of student academic achievement show that such achievement is very limited. On the other hand, the study of student academic performance yields valuable information to aid in developing effective education policies and practices, both on the national scale and within individual schools.
- Both completion and student learning achievement in primary education show the prevalence of problems related to equity. In effect, the probability of concluding this level as well as lower levels of learning tends to occur among the most disadvantaged segments of the population in every country.
- The above phenomena are also linked to key questions of waste of resources due to grade repetition and late-age entry in primary education. In effect, the presence in classrooms of students who are

over-age is a widespread occurrence that conspires against the probability of successful conclusion. Moreover, 5.7 billion USD (PPP) are spent each year in order to pay for the studies of grade repeaters. These resources could very well be used to improve learning conditions of students and to assure their universal right to conclude quality primary education.

- Levels of access to secondary education show significant progress. Eleven countries have already assured that at least 75% of young people of the age to frequent this level are doing so.
- Although the Summit of the Americas has not set a numerical goal for completion of secondary education, such levels are still very limited. In only three countries of the eighteen for which we have information has at least 60% of the 20 to 24 year-old population concluded secondary education. In most of the countries observed, this proportion is less than one-half.
- At the same time, disparities between social groups in regard to the completion of secondary schooling are not only more marked, but also more extended than in the case of primary education. All countries must make significant efforts in order to close current equity gaps.
- On the other hand, the situation in regard to the part of the goal that states the need to have ever higher conclusion rates shows a very disparate scenario in which in spite of significant progress in some countries, in others there is stagnation in conclusion levels of the last 25 years.
- Although there is little information available about levels of quality in secondary education, a first and imperfect approximation is provided by learning levels achieved in the 15 year-old population. In this regard, there is a clear gap between countries such as the United States and Canada and those in Latin America for which information is available. In effect, not only is the fraction of 15 year-olds who reach secondary school in Latin America markedly lower; the learning levels that they achieve are lower as well. Thus, according to the PISA study, while in the United States and Canada two thirds of this population achieve acceptable or superior levels in reading and writing, the figure is, in the best of cases, one in five in the Latin American countries observed.
- Compulsory schooling levels within countries do not merely describe the system; they also are a measure of the political commitment of States. In this sense, it is important to note that those countries with lower levels of compulsory study and that begin primary schooling relatively late are the very ones in which we see the greatest difficulties in regard to progress toward the goals.
- Education as a continuous lifelong learning process involves supplying a variety of modes of educational programs able to meet multiples demands by the Summit of Americas countries. Moreover, such offerings should go far beyond programs designed for improvement, leveling of professional skills, and job promotion. There are important challenges for enabling the adult population to acquire basic education

competencies. Illiteracy rates for the population of 15 years old and over in some countries still show figures above 20%. On the other hand, the expansion on primary and secondary educational services has contributed to significantly reducing illiteracy among the 15 to 24 years old population. Regarding equity, in some countries there are significant literacy gender gaps against women. In rural areas, the average of years of schooling of the 25 to 29 years old population is still much lower than those for urban areas.

- It is possible to identify a multiplicity of labor market-oriented education programs that are a product of the interaction and coordination of a variety of institutions and organizations with specific interest in these kind of training programs. Education and training Institutions, the business sector, Ministries of Education and Labor, and the workers' unions have been cooperating to construct a complex framework of training systems and occupational competencies designed primarily for the youth and adult population. On the other hand, in some countries there is a framework of educational programs designed for personal development.

The second category of conclusions is directly related to context factors that underlie the situation described above and to how different education policies treat the question of context with different degrees of success. In this regard, we note the following:

- Unfortunately, we see a tendency for countries that are more distant from achieving the goals outlined by the Summit of the Americas to be precisely those with lower levels of relative wealth, lower levels of relative development, as well as being those that face greater social pressures due to higher rates of demographic growth and dependence.
- However, this is not an iron-clad rule. There are cases of countries with relatively fewer resources and facing more demanding conditions that have achieved not only rates of progress similar to those of countries with better conditions, but have done so at a decidedly more rapid pace.
- An illustrative case is that of Bolivia - a country that shows that highest rate of growth in secondary school conclusion levels in the last 25 years. In this sense, understanding the social process behind this progress is a task that can provide important information for countries that, with social conditions similar to those of Bolivia, do not demonstrate similar levels of progress.
- In this same sense, of note is the limited progress or even stagnation observed in regard to some of the goals in countries such as Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Honduras. In particular, levels of secondary education completion in these countries should be examined carefully.

The third category of conclusions is related to the needs, progress, and gaps in information need to describe the state of education. In this regard, it is important to consider the following:

- Development of this report has been possible thanks to a sustained effort by countries and by UNESCO in order to guarantee a regular and growing production of internationally comparable information.

- In effect, a comparison of information currently available with that which could be used four years ago for production of the first **Educational Panorama of the Americas** of PRIE shows significant levels of progress.
- However, there is still a broad set of areas where it is possible to increase both the quantity and quality of available information. In effect, areas such as that of financial information continue to present great challenges both in terms of coverage and comparability of available data. Other areas such as calculation of the numbers of equivalent full-time teachers still require additional effort. It is possible to speculate that a broad sub-set of Summit of the Americas countries could report greater volumes of information that would enrich comparative international analysis. This is an area in which PRIE offers support in agreement with the international data collection program carried out by UNESCO.
- One of the critical areas in terms of the availability of information is broadening the possibilities of analyzing heterogeneity within countries and the possible relation that some of these disparities may have with themes related to equity. In this sense, strengthening national education information systems such as national systems that are composed of diverse actors, among which stand out ministries of education and national statistics institutes, is a key area in which PRIE plays a jointly with the regional program for strengthening national capacities carried out by UNESCO.
- An additional area that requires significant effort in order to assure availability of information for comparative international analysis is that related to learning content and achievement. Determining basic learning needs that all students should achieve as well as measuring levels of student performance is a key area. In this field, PRIE has begun a project designed to review experiences that contribute to defining basic contents. This is of primary importance in order to contribute to the efforts carried out by UNESCO through the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education in the area of the measurement of student academic achievement.