



## MAKING EDUCATION EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

PREAL's business-education partners hold international conference in Guatemala

Education leaders at the recent "Central American and Dominican Meeting of Business Leaders for Education" in Guatemala City affirmed that, in the words of *Empresarios por la Educación* (ExE) Vice President Salvador Paiz, "Education is an issue for everyone" and that "Businesses and business leaders have a role to play...in promoting public policies that improve education quality."

Organized by PREAL and ExE on September 27-28, the event attracted some 70 business and education leaders from throughout Central America to discuss business sector engagement in education reform. Through a series of panel discussions and presentations, participants identified shortcomings in Central American education systems and shared lessons learned from a variety of efforts to confront them. Speakers included President Otto Pérez Molina, Minister of Education Cynthia del Águila, PREAL Co-director Jeffrey Puryear, ExE President Diana Canella, and representatives of private education initiatives from nine countries.

In their remarks during the first day of meetings, Pérez and Paiz both highlighted the importance of education to national economies. The president argued that a "direct link" exists between education and international competitiveness. Paiz noted that this link underscores the importance of investing in education, citing Benjamin Franklin's assertion that "An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

**Header Image: President Otto Pérez Molina speaks during the Central American and Dominican Meeting of Business Leaders for Education, held in Guatemala City on September 27-28. Image is from the [Government of Guatemala](#).**

During the second day of meetings, Puryear discussed the role of indicators in promoting policy reform, with a particular emphasis on PREAL's education report cards. He noted three key obstacles that make policy reform difficult: groups with enormous power (teachers unions and ministerial bureaucracies), groups with very little power (poor families and school principals), and groups that are absent from the public education system altogether (middle- and upper-class parents). The result is a power imbalance that harms the interests of students.

A panel of foundation leaders from Guatemala, including Lucía Herrera, president of *Fundación Panteleon*; Yolanda Mayora, executive director of *Fundación Carlos F. Novell*; Estuardo Olivares, Country Director for *Fundación Telefónica*; and Herbert González, president of *Fundazúcar*, also spoke on ways to support schools in improving education quality and student learning. Moderated by Inés Torrebiarte de Bolaños, of ExE-Guatemala and *Grupo Cobán*, panelists discussed

efforts to improve school infrastructure and reduce the digital divide.

International speakers, including Miriam de Bandes, of the Business Foundation for Educational Development (FEPADE) in El Salvador; Michael Dickman, president of the Ricardo Ernesto Maduro Andreu Education Foundation (FEREMA) in Honduras; Aline Flores, president of the Honduran Council of Private Business (COHEP); Claudia X. González, president of *Mexicanos Primero*; Ernesto Medina, president of EDUQUEMOS in Nicaragua; Maximiliano Ortúzar, of *Elige Educar* in Chile; Alberto

"Education is an issue for everyone...  
Businesses and business leaders have  
a role to play in promoting public  
policies that improve education  
quality."

– **Salvador Paiz**  
**Vice President, Empresarios  
por la Educación, Guatemala**



**PREAL Co-director Jeffrey Puryear spoke on the impact of performance indicators, including PREAL's Report Cards, on education reform. Image by PREAL Staff.**

Pfeifer, executive director of the Business Council of Latin America and representative of Todos Pela Educação in Brazil; Elena Viyella, president of Action for Education (EDUCA) in the Dominican Republic and member of the Inter-American Dialogue's Board of Directors; and Roberto Zamora, president of *Fundación Zamora Terán* in Nicaragua, provided insight from private sector reforms in their own countries.

For example, Viyella highlighted the success of the [Coalición Educación Digna](#), a group of civil society organizations that has united to demand that the Dominican government abide by a law designating 4% of GDP to education. González noted the importance of informing the public of how their schools are doing, such as through the recent documentary released in Mexico, "[¡De Panzazo!](#)"

Additional speakers included Carlos Amador, of Pronacom, ExE-Guatemala, and the Private Council for Competitiveness; Cristiana de Amenábar, member of the ExE board of directors and the organizing committee of the 100 Point Teachers Prize; Carlos Enrique Mata, president of the Advertising Business Council (CEP) of Guatemala; Francisco Miranda López, academic coordinator of the in Education Policy and Management program at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) in Mexico; Juan Carlos Paiz, Guatemalan presidential commissioner for competitiveness; Maria Silvia Pineda, executive director of Corporate Social Responsibility at *Fundazucar*; Fernando Rubio, director of USAID's Education Reform in the Classroom (REAULA); Melanie de Saravia, of ExE-

Guatemala and Citibank; and Raquel Zelaya, of the *Gran Campaña Nacional de Educación* and the Association for Research and Social Studies (ASIES).

At the conclusion of the conference, the Central American, Dominican, and Mexican business-education groups, along with PREAL, signed a [joint statement](#) on their commitment to improving education in the region and calling for "the establishment of partnerships between governments, civil society organizations, and business leaders to promote education quality."

The joint statement and the event itself demonstrate the growing role of business leaders in education policy efforts throughout the region, and policymakers' recognition that the private sector possesses a valuable perspective on education shortcomings. PREAL and its partners play a critical role in shaping public-private partnerships in the region, and will continue to work with leaders to ensure that education becomes an issue for all.

The Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL) is a joint program of:

CINDE

30  
INTER-AMERICAN  
DIALOGUE  
YEARS  
SHAPING POLICY DEBATE FOR ACTION