

Strategic Partnership Project



October-November 2010

QUALITY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT MODEL IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

In collaboration with the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL) a consortium of organizations including the Center for Research in Education and Human Development (CIEDHUMANO) of the Pontifical Catholic University (PUCMM), the Faculty for Latin American Social Sciences (FLACSO-DR), and Action for Basic Education (EDUCA) developed an initiative to help improve ongoing efforts of education decentralization and school management in the Dominican Republic. PREAL and its partners implemented the “Quality School Management Model in the Dominican Republic” project from 2008 to 2010, which focused on training school leaders to be effective protagonists in the process of improving the quality of education in their own schools and districts, and aligning these efforts with national policy and initiatives.

Since its first major education system overhaul in 1992, the Dominican Republic has pushed for reforms to address the low quality of its public schools. National and regional evaluations confirm that Dominican students achieve at the lowest levels in the Western Hemisphere. Its national education policy reforms, including the 10-Year National Education Plan of 1992-2002, the Strategic Education Development Plan of 2003-2010, and the 10-year Education Plan of 2008-2018 have each attempted to address the shortcomings of the system, including boosting enrollment, improving standards, strengthening teaching, and decentralizing decision making. Though often expertly conceived, most of the key aspects of these reforms have faltered at the implementation stage.

SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL AUTONOMY

In 2006, the Ministry of Education (MINERD) published the “Model for Quality Management for Educational Systems” (MGCE), which encourages schools and their parent districts to assume greater autonomy, and to effectively become “learning communities” capable of designing and implementing their own improvement plans in line with national priorities. Simultaneously, a process of institutional modernization began, with the European Union’s support, to convert the country’s 82 school districts into semi-autonomous units with a real capacity to plan, guide, supervise, and monitor the education services provided by MINERD, as well as the private education sector within their jurisdictions.

With support from PREAL and in collaboration with MINERD, the Center for Research in Education and Human Development (CIEDHUMANO) of the Pontifical Catholic University (PUCMM), the Faculty of Latin American Social Sciences (FLACSO-DR), and Action for Basic Education (EDUCA) began the project “Quality School Management Model in the Dominican Republic.” This project was designed to accompany the process of increased educational autonomy and to ensure that school leaders have the appropriate tools and support necessary to optimize education quality.

To this end, the project was designed to intervene at three levels:

- Schools and school management
- School districts and district-wide planning processes
- Public policy, including budget allocation and community participation.

The project (see Box 1) was implemented between July 2008 and June 2010 in three pilot school districts: 8-03 (the southern part of the municipality of Santiago), 1915-2005 (Herrera, a sector of the municipality of Santo Domingo-West) and 6-03 (the municipality of Jarabacoa).

The project began during a period of governmental and ministry transition in August 2008. The new minister of education presented the new national education plan (2008-2012), which introduced the foci of effective class time and efficient educational



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planning. It led the project team to focus their strategy of intervention to be more consistent with MINERD's new national foci, and actively sought collaboration with MINERD in selecting the pilot school districts and coordinating the project's activities related to implementation of the MGCE. .

According to MINERD, effective implementation of the MGCE is meant to:

- Ensure compliance with the school calendar and present timetable.
- Promote the organization of educational management teams.
- Facilitate implementation of the curriculum in order to achieve quality learning and development for all students.

MINERD's approach has been to focus on compliance with performance indicators based on the curriculum, and has, at the same time as the launch of the Strategic Partnerships Project, rolled out a media campaign with expectations for each grade level as the main instrument in designing the improvement plan, known as 1000x1000.

VISION & STRATEGY

The project supports the role of the district and the school in improvement processes within the educational system. An analysis of the past 50 years of reforms reveals that the vast majority of them occurred at the macro-policy level. They have been focused on national policies and strategies, but have been sparse on reforms that reach the classroom level. By contrast, the MGCE seeks to impact management of schools in order to have a direct impact on classroom learning.

Box 1

Strategic Partnership Project: Quality School Management Model in the Dominican Republic

OBJECTIVES:

- Support school districts in developing the capacity to formulate and implement local strategies of quality school management in line with national policy.
- Facilitate transformation of organizational methods to encourage professional autonomy, and the empowerment of both the district and the school to lead their own improvement processes through integration and institutionalization of national policy guidelines, educational research and professional best practices.
- Transform existing management practices by organizing weekly technical team meetings that encourage and teach self-reflection, teamwork, planning, monitoring, and tracking to become professional learning communities that can initiate and sustain institutional improvements.
- Influence the public policy discourse with regard to the allocation of the education budget, community and parent involvement, and expansion of the project implementation at the national level.

The project's implementation of the MGCE was designed to:

- Use regular working hours for districts and schools and transform them into training opportunities. These include: weekly district meetings, team management meetings, network meetings that reunite school principals, and school management meetings.
- Transform team meetings to include activities with critical reflection on stakeholder practices that promote the capacity to work collaboratively, through self-reflection, coaching, planning, and monitoring.
- Develop a mutual understanding on why change is necessary for the improvement of educational leadership.

The model of intervention assumes that the district officials, principals, and teachers take on leadership roles, and begin an ongoing process of improvement that involves transforming relatively weak organizational units into stronger, autonomous units able to effectively marshal resources, determine needs and priorities, and make decisions based on the best interests of their schools and communities.

Along with developing the capacity for increased district and school autonomy, the project team worked on developing more effective instruments for the accountability of technical work, institutional performance, and preparing principals for working with their management teams and teachers.

RESULTS

CULTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Using the strategic guidelines of MINERD's 1000x1000 campaign, and based on the goal of empowering school districts to monitor and support their own educational quality, a 10-year strategic plan was developed in each of the three pilot districts.

As a result, the three districts have their respective long-term strategic plans and the annual operating plan (2009-2010), designed after the first one. Each plan is based in part on MINERD's own national 10-year plan (2008 – 2018), which prioritizes increased coverage, equity, quality, and community participation.

After the strategic planning phase, activities were focused on generating capacity in the three districts. A joint committee comprised of the leaders from each partner organization was formed to help create a framework for the practitioners to follow. This committee was successful in pushing strategic behavioral changes at the district level through:

- Synthesizing the weekly meetings of the district technical team and turning them into opportunities for reflection on current practices, and progress toward building professional learning communities.
- Developing a common understanding of the district's specific tasks and why they are what they are.
- Transforming the focus of district officials, management teams, and teachers with a more focused approach to student learning.
- Increasing the technical support available to districts and schools.
- Moving toward a culture of district and school accountability, focused on student performance and the factors affecting it. (See Box 2).

- Developing tools to structure and systematize the work of data collection, monitoring and evaluation efforts.
- Focusing on supporting new strategies in specific schools in each district.
- Developing a culture of short, medium and long-term planning, through a systematic daily, monthly, and yearly programming sequence.
- Involving the local communities in assessing the needs of and responsibilities for improving education.
- Strengthening opportunities for reflection and professional growth of school management teams about their roles as both channels of communication between national plans and local leaders of educational improvement.
- Augmenting the role of the school district to plan, implement, supervise, and monitor public policies in the territories under their jurisdiction. The three pilot districts have already begun a process of technical and administrative restructuring.

CIVIL SOCIETY & SCHOOLS

The project engaged the local community in the process of preparing the district's academic plans through signing community social pacts in each district. Participants included local government officials, business leaders, clergy members, and other civil society organizations. Community advisory boards were created to represent civil society in monitoring educational plans. A direct result of the active participation of members of the Association of Parents and Friends of the School (APMA) in one of the pilot districts was the formation of Parent Committees in each classroom.

The level and quality of local participation that the project generated was viewed extremely positively by MINERD which, with continued support from USAID, agreed to begin scaling up the project to the national level by working with project partners in five more school districts through 2012.

POLITICAL IMPACT

As well as local capacity building, the project had an advocacy component designed to foster and inform an ongoing national debate on policy options for improving efficiency in local management. The successful creation of the strategic plans for all three districts represents not only the assumption of local responsibility for improvement, but also the creation of a bottom-up policy input system, which represents a shift in the traditional dynamic of policy directives, and the cooperation of the Ministry of Education in systematizing and institutionalizing this dynamic. This process involved conducting an average of fifteen workshops, seminars, and working groups in each school district, with the participation of over one thousand participants.

Finally, considering that achieving a degree of decentralization among the districts necessarily requires a degree of financial autonomy that heretofore has not existed, the project promoted a debate on the minimum budget requirements for a school to offer a quality education. For this purpose, a paper entitled, "Assessment of the Market Basket of Costs for Basic Education in the Dominican Republic: Inputs for a Quality Education" was commissioned, published, and publicly debated. The study

Box 2

Accountability for learning

For schools and districts to become autonomous actors in promoting student learning, it is necessary that school leaders assume the responsibility for educational outcomes. The model stresses that districts should act to develop the capacity for schools to both improve and to set expectations for these improvements. From this perspective, actions to provide consistent and reliable information regarding the performance of each school and each student in relation to the established standards are crucial.

To support this effort, district-wide strategic plans include information generation and feedback loops. Current systems now depend on information fed directly from the schools, which in turn depend on the proper functioning of an adequately decentralized system as proposed in the model.

reviewed five distinct school management models, including resource allocation, and compared them with key educational outcomes. Recommendations included several options for using existing school funding in different permutations, including on more technical support for teachers, so as to maximize efficiency of learning outcomes. To date, two forums have been organized to discuss these recommendations, one in Santo Domingo and the other in Santiago, where more than 300 people have participated, including the minister of education and leaders from the private sector, academia, and civil society. ©

Box 3

Lessons from the Policy Advocacy Process

- Influencing education policy, whether in the formulation or implementation of educational public policy approaches, requires direct partnerships with the public sector and community groups at the local, regional, and national levels.
- Improving the quality of education is an area of public policy where there is little disagreement between education officials and civil society. Therefore, a key challenge is translating existing discourse on education quality into action that generates more, better and measurable learning outcomes for students.
- Within the different levels of operation of the Dominican education system, experience shows that reform must accommodate the everyday working activities of education professionals and adapt to their established processes. Change in institutional management and learning processes of districts and their respective institutions will not occur if the target groups are not fully aware of and engaged with the proposed changes at a level of ownership that does not impose change but rather complements and improves established practices.

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