

Education

Introduction

The most important educational goals in Mexico are to improve academic achievement and access to higher education, as well as to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas, as well as between public and private schools.¹ Baja California Sur faces some unique challenges due to the high influx of migrant families from the interior of Mexico who bring children facing malnutrition, illiteracy, and parental pressure to work, instead of attend school. Transportation to secondary and higher education is particularly problematic for children and youth in rural and outlying urban areas.

According to Baja California Sur's State Ministry of Education (SEPE), during the 2002-2003 school year, the rate of failure and student drop outs (mainly at the middle and high school levels) was proportionately high, taking into account that Baja California Sur is considered one of the Mexican states with a high degree of educational attainment, with 8.74 years on average, and with the seventh lowest rate of education marginalization.²

Although there is broad coverage for all levels of education in the five municipalities, student learning shows deficiencies, especially in middle school and high school, mainly due to a lack of teaching resources. Schools have not adequately addressed the availability of educational materials, including school libraries, the correlation between the student population's socio-economic/geographic situation and the quality of education that they have access to, and the inadequate levels of training that teachers receive.³

Education in Mexico: Overview

Mexico still has enormous inequalities in the area of education, where over 2.1 million children and young people do not attend school. This group includes the handicapped, members of some indigenous ethnic groups, agricultural workers (who live in conditions of extreme poverty), and street children. Among the biggest gaps in Mexico's educational system are at the preschool and secondary school levels.⁴ Mexico also has a problem with dropouts, specifically among the lower income sectors where over 30% of the poorest population does not finish primary school, compared with only 3% of the highest income population. Nationally, almost 8% of children between twelve and fourteen years of age are already working, and, of those, almost 80% belong to lower income households.⁵

In the coming years, the challenge for the Mexican education system will be to develop strategies that encourage students to stay in school, especially at the junior high and high school levels because, in spite of a four-fold increase in investment, 85% of Mexico's young people still do not finish high school. Consequently, the percentage of Mexico's population that is achieving a level of higher education is minimal.



Public Education

In Mexico, an overwhelming majority of students receive primary and secondary education in public schools. In the case of primary schools, 94% of all Mexican students attended public institutions in 2001. Similarly, 93% of enrolled students attended a public *secundaria* (lower-secondary school, or middle school), and 78% of enrolled attended public *preparatoria* (upper-secondary schools, or high school).⁶

Further, the Mexican government allocates a much higher share of its budget to higher education than primary and secondary education. According to the World Bank, in 2003, 14.3% of GDP per capita was dedicated to primary education, 15.2% to secondary education, and 47.4% to higher education. Given the high dropout rates at the primary and secondary education levels, coupled with the disproportionate amount of funding going to higher



into building 214 structures, renovating 80 structures, and equipping an additional 64 spaces dedicated to educational purposes. Further, in December 2003, US\$2.84 million was allocated for additional programs (with an additional \$785,176 being spent on pencils, notebooks, and teacher training) to improve educational equity and infrastructure.¹⁰ According to SEPE's former administrator, Prof. Víctor Castro Cosío (current Municipal President of La Paz), the federal government must pay for 500 teaching positions that the state government is currently covering to ensure that each classroom has a teacher. The annual impact of this federal unfunded mandate is US\$2.78 million.¹¹

The state government's response to students dropping out for financial reasons has been to increase the number of scholarships for the 2004-2005 year. During that year, there were 23,718 scholarships (up from 23,102 scholarships in 2003-2004), and one out of every ten students had a scholarship. There is also a special scholarship program for pregnant women and girls who have not completed their general education. Thirty-three percent of the state's population is part of the education system, ranging from primary education to the graduate level.

education, one could make the case that the Mexican government should reconsider how it is currently spending the 5.3% of GDP being spent on education (as of 2003).⁷

When compared to other Mexican states, Baja California Sur offers a full range of educational opportunities from primary school to post-graduate education. Baja California has more university-level researchers than the national mean (0.67 researchers for every 100,000 inhabitants vs. Baja California Sur at 1.4).⁸ Public education accounts for 80% and private education accounts for the remaining 20% of the population's schooling.⁹

However, there are still major gaps in transportation and accessibility for potential students, despite the availability of educational opportunities. Primary schooling can usually be obtained at the local level in rural areas, but for a secondary and/or high school education, students are often required to travel to the municipality's largest city, which can be cost-prohibitive for most families.

Key Findings

1. Resource allocation

A high percentage of Baja California Sur's budget is allocated to education, reflecting its status as a top priority for the state government. In 2003, a variety of government-sponsored sources invested approximately US\$5.25 million

2. Areas overlooked by the current educational system

Both public and private *secundarias* and *preparatorias* in the state have developed curricula that are attempting to respond to the demands of the changing economy in Baja California Sur. Some *preparatorias* offer courses geared toward the tourism sector (i.e. scuba diving technician) and the manufacturing sector (computer or industrial engineering). However, according to reports by the former SEPE official, Prof. Víctor Manuel Castro, the state's middle school curriculum has not been updated in fifty years.¹²

In fact, all levels of education need to be re-oriented to meet the current societal needs. Skills that respond to economic trends are not being prioritized in Baja California Sur; migrants from Mexico City and elsewhere are competing favorably for jobs in the state, including for small and medium-sized business opportunities.¹³ Furthermore, local history and traditions are poorly represented or absent altogether in school curricula at all levels.

Higher education offers degrees in Administration and Social Sciences, including education, law, business, political science, communications, marketing, literature, tourism development, hotel management, accounting, language, history, and philosophy. Other degrees are related to science and research, natural resource use, and engineering, which are aimed at the specific needs of the state's economic development.

Figure 18: Total number of Students Registered in Special Education, School Years 2002 - 2004, by Grade Level and Municipality

Municipality	Primary year 2002	Secondary year 2002	Primary year 2003	Secondary year 2003	Primary Year 2004	Secondary Year 2004
Comondú	477	0	545	0	545	56
Mulegé	326	0	698	2	698	81
La Paz	1142	46	1263	42	1263	57
Los Cabos	711	3	858	1	858	77
Loreto	91	0	167	1	167	73
BCS	2,747	49	3,531	46*	3,531	344**

Source: Secretary of Public Education in BCS. Department of Information Systems and Statistics.

* -Corresponds to a pilot program based in La Paz that was expanded to other municipalities in 2004.**-Information validated by the State Information Center.

Environmental education has not been a priority for primary schools and *secundarias*, despite the fact that Baja California Sur is known throughout the world as a unique collection of ecosystems that are still relatively intact. This lack of understanding is manifest in such actions by local children as throwing trash on the street, in town, and on the beach. Although SEPE has incorporated environmental education into the formal system, the curriculum does not contain sufficient information on this topic. Hopefully, this will be updated as the recently-published SEMARNAT/Centro de Educación y Capacitación para el Desarrollo Sustentable (Center for Sustainable Development Education and Training-CECADESU) environmental education plan for Baja California Sur is implemented.¹⁴

3. Needs of children with disabilities

Educational attention to children with disabilities varies due to the lack of well-defined services. According to information from the 2000 national census, the number of people in Baja California Sur with some kind of handicap was 6,835, of which 66.7% are children and young people.¹⁵ The main handicaps are motor, visual, mental, auditory, and language disabilities.

Special education is provided in four types of educational facilities. In regular school and in an integrated manner, services are provided to: 969 students in pre-school; 3,531 in primary school; and 344 students attend secondary school (these special education units are registered under 273 primary schools or 46.3% of public schools). In multiple care centers throughout the state, there are fourteen educational establishments where 680 students are registered that due to their specific conditions, cannot be registered in a regular school. 132 students with disabilities attend pre-school courses in the Centers of Psycho-Pedagogical Care. Finally, the Resource Information

Centers are the backbone of Special Education. Their role is to guide parents through the special education system and help support each family regarding their specific disability. At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, 1,300 students were looked after at these centers.¹⁶

As seen in the table above, services are currently concentrated in La Paz and in primary schools. This will change with the advent of a statewide contract to accelerate the process for services to the disabled. Training, orthopedic equipment, and infrastructure improvements, such as bars, ramps and adaptive playgrounds, will be prioritized through a new state-sponsored program. Nonprofit organizations are taking the lead, with assistance from state agencies and the Family Development Agency (DIF) in each municipality; a new association of social service organizations will help coordinate activities. In addition, job training workshops, clinics, and medical services will be incorporated.¹⁷



Private schools do not have the capacity to respond adequately to students with special education needs, particularly the mentally disabled. Only a single private institution in the city of La Paz tackles integrated education for the mentally challenged or disabled, applying the Montessori System; this school has had significant results in stimulating the abilities of these students. Nevertheless, because of the method (Montessori only serves small groups) and the high cost, this system is only affordable to a very small sector of the special-needs population and for that matter, it is only available in La Paz. This situation must be addressed so that families with special needs can access appropriate education, training, and care for their children.

In order to integrate special education students into mainstream social and working life, it is critical to increase their academic success before introducing them to a working atmosphere that may be hostile and discriminatory. The Baja California Sur Institute for Attention to Disabled Persons (*Instituto Sudcaliforniano de Atención a Personas con Discapacidad*) promotes recruiting handicapped people for employment, as well as informing families about government programs that offer productive employment to this segment of the population. Still, a lack of opportunities remains for disabled people who want training to become effective in the workplace.

4. Needs of the indigenous population

In Baja California Sur, there is no native indigenous population, although a large portion of the migrant workforce is from diverse indigenous groups from the central and southern parts of Mexico. The Migrant Child Program (PRONIM) works to recruit teachers and purchase educational materials for these often impoverished students.¹⁸ This strategy does not fully address those students' needs for a number of reasons, including: a lack of government regulations forcing owners of agricultural fields

to dedicate a place for PRONIM to build a school; language barriers for students who speak indigenous languages and do not understand Spanish; the lack of books designed for teaching children in languages other than Spanish; and the high level of illiteracy among the migrant indigenous population.

Under these circumstances, the learning process is inefficient for both teachers and students. Presently, PRONIM has six schools in the Vizcaíno area; in Loreto, there is only one school, which has no electrical power (they use candles for lighting) and the building is in poor condition. In the La Paz municipality there are just seven PRONIM schools.

5. Continuing education

Twelve thousand adults have no access to any kind of educational services, even though a significant portion of the population has not finished *preparatoria* or primary school.¹⁹ Approximately 137,290 adults over fifteen years of age have not attained a basic education, accounting for 42% of the total population of the state. The main reason for this is general apathy, as many people do not see any social or economic advantage to further their education. Another factor is drastic budget cuts within the State Institute of Adult Education (IEEA), the organization which provides continuing education services in the state.

Additional areas of need pertaining to continuing education are adult work training and on-the-job training. The Secretary for Labor and Social Benefits and the state government have implemented a set of training and employment support programs to promote a new labor standard that is certified by the ISO 9000 quality system. These programs focus on decreasing unemployment and underemployment with short courses, followed by a scholarship. The current programs include skilled labor

Figure 19: Estimate of Educational Attainment Among People Over 15 Years of Age as of December 31, 2003

Municipality	People over 15	Total number lacking a formal education	Illiterate	%	No primary school	%	No Secondary school	%
Comondú	52,578	24,210	3,070	5.84	10,150	19.53	10,990	20.90
Mulegé	39,509	17,920	1,620	4.10	6,930	17.80	9,370	23.72
La Paz	163,300	55,630	4,480	2.74	18,730	11.60	32,420	19.85
Los Cabos	63,801	23,850	1,680	2.66	11,010	19.23	17,860	31.28
Loreto	7,972	4,680	380	4.77	1,600	20.37	2,700	33.87
B.C.S.	327,168	137,290	12,330	3.8	49,520	15.1	76,440	23.1

Source: State Institute for Adult Education. Planning Under directorate.

training, on-the-job labor training, training for self-employment, productive sector training, training vouchers (pilot program), training for unemployed professionals and technicians (pilot program), and training for workers in defunct companies (pilot program).



6. Preschool/childcare

The largest demand area in the state's education system is, without a doubt, preschool education. The prevailing need among working mothers for safe and professional places to look after their children during the work day, particularly in the more urban municipalities, has not been solved by the government or private sectors. Day care centers are managed by the Mexican Institute for Security and Social Services for Government Workers (ISSSTE), and service is provided to women who work for the federal government. The Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) focuses on children whose mothers work in the private sector. The municipal DIF oversees the general population in local community centers and Multiple Attention Centers. Presently, the DIF takes care of 5,997 children (forty-five days old to four years) throughout the state. Finally, several nonprofits, especially in Los Cabos, have opened daycare centers to accommodate working mothers in the tourism sector.

Although private education has a larger geographic reach than public education for pre-school, results for infant development are erratic, since many of these private centers are not regulated by SEPE, and do not have an accredited child stimulation program, nor do they have highly trained workers.

7. Government response to education needs

According to the Secretary for Economic Promotion and Development, investments in educational programs have shown sustained progress. However, in 2003-2004, federal

investment was reduced significantly. The state has secured financial resources from other programs, but they are not sufficient to match population growth and complexities relating to migrant workers, special education, and rural education.

The state government's strategy has been to prioritize programs, such as the Normal Federal Program, the Fund for Education Contributions, High School and Technical Education, Science and Technology, and the Social Services Program, to satisfy 100% of the demand for education. However, according to INEGI, projections for the coming school year show a demand for education services that will be higher than the supply.

Finally, to preserve and maintain school infrastructure, SEPE has launched the state "Dignified School" project where every peso that the school contributes through parent associations, education authorities, etc., the government will contribute two pesos.

8. Significance of schools and natural disaster preparedness

In Baja California Sur, a school is not limited to the education of a student population, but it also often functions as a de facto community center. It serves as a home for social gatherings, sports and cultural events, as well as a shelter in case of natural disasters. Authorities from the state system for civilian protection and SEPE assigned 64 school buildings to accommodate geographically and socially vulnerable people in case of hurricanes, a frequent phenomenon in the state during the second half of the year. In each school there is a sign indicating the number of people it can accommodate, as well as the corresponding surrounding neighborhoods.²⁰

This is particularly important when recognizing that many educational facilities are not up to standards for earthquake standards. Recent tremors of 6.7 magnitude near Santa Rosalía are reminders that Baja California Sur is an earthquake-prone zone.

Needs by Municipality

1. Comondú

In the rural municipality of Comondú, education authorities, agricultural field owners and managers, and civil society all agreed that the educational needs of migrant children and adult migrants were the number one education priority. The migrant situation is complicated in Comondú because of the large number of agricultural workers who reach the Valle de Santo Domingo, yet stay there only temporarily (this valley

has 90% of the agricultural and livestock activities in the state). Education services provided by “Education Programs for Migrants” are not sufficient because of a lack of infrastructure and capability (as to material and human resources), a scattered migrant population, and the lack of sensitivity on the part of the owners of agricultural fields who facilitate access to education for the migrant population.

Another vulnerable group is children living in very poor, rural areas who, because of economic conditions, do not have access to schools. This group has the highest level of illiteracy in the municipality, resulting in unemployment or under-employment, drug addiction, violence, or further marginalization. There is a need to increase the presence of IEEA’s literacy and primary education programs for young people, as well as to increase the number of boarding schools and dormitories for students.

Furthermore, teachers of the Higher Institute of Ciudad Constitución said that it is very important that Comondú’s schools respond to the particular needs of the business/employment sector, thereby improving efficiency in the region’s industry. To this end, residents consider it important to enter into national and international agreements with other institutions to generate meeting places for technological and scientific exchange regarding agricultural and livestock activities.



2. La Paz

Because La Paz is the capital of Baja California Sur, it has more educational facilities than the other municipalities, but it also has a bigger strain on its educational resources. In addition, there are a large number of low-density rural areas with an insufficient population justify building a school, according to education regulations. For this reason, many students end up in La Paz on scholarships to continue their studies.

An overt need of the community of La Paz is for day care centers for the children of working mothers, as almost half

the women in the municipality work.²¹ All day care centers in the municipality need to be regulated by SEPE, and have the adequate personnel to look after the children. There are many private day care centers, but they can be expensive. More centers should be constructed and staffed, in addition to providing subsidies for private day care centers so that they can provide services at a more affordable cost.

Another area of concern is with vulnerable groups and those to whom the education system does not provide adequate spaces in quality and quantity. Among them are the handicapped, the rural population, migrants, and at-risk youth.

Agricultural workers in the La Paz municipality are one of the groups most in need, not only for education, but also health, housing, social security, labor security, etc. Many factors affect their access to education, including the existence of an education program in the camp they work in, their knowledge of the Spanish language, and a place in the camp where they can do their homework.

Another major need is to better equip schools in marginal rural and urban areas with furniture, libraries, and school supplies. Finally, school authorities must have stronger control over schools where teachers’ absenteeism is high.

3. Loreto

Civic leaders in Loreto recognize that the four preschools available are not sufficient for the number of children who need to attend. The two *secundarias* and *preparatorias* are insufficient both in quantity and quality because students who finish *secundaria* are not well-trained and find it very difficult to enroll in *preparatoria* because they are unable to pass the entrance exams. The result is that many students receive only a basic education. Clearly, teachers must be better trained, and more secondary schools must be built because student groups are very large, resulting in less individual attention for each student.

Working mothers are in need of additional preschool and daycare services, wherein daycare centers adopt more flexible hours as many women work doing service jobs for hotels. Their working hours are subject to change according to the seasonality of the tourism sector, and hence many women have problems finding a daycare center that is able to accommodate.

4. Los Cabos

High population growth in the municipality of Los Cabos, specifically in Cabo San Lucas, has resulted in insufficient educational services vis-à-vis demand. The priority educational need in the municipality, therefore, is school construction, as well as teacher recruitment. The need for

additional preschools is even higher, with a 50% increase in the registration of students in 2004-2005 over the previous year.²² The demand for preschools is expected to continue to increase, as 47.4% of the total population of the municipality is job-seeking and working women, and day care is a critical component of their successful hunt for employment.



Addressing the domestic and foreign migration phenomenon is another important issue for the municipality's educational services, as the 2000 census showed that almost half of the municipality's population is originally from outside of the state. There is a clear need for informal education to accommodate the diverse social groups in the region so that people can better face social, economic, cultural, and labor issues.

Another interest is to improve the management of "volunteer fees" that parents contribute at the beginning of the school year to help with expenses to maintain the school. Not only are the fees mismanaged due to a lack of community oversight, but parents have expressed their discontent because some schools require these contributions in order to register the child and to deliver school reports, when such contributions are supposed to be voluntary. Because these are now matched by state programs, it is even more important to monitor these investments.

Continuing education for adults is also a main priority for Los Cabos. Residents want more job training centers to help workers update their skills. Concurrently, residents also want to expand access to courses for high school diplomas or equivalencies as a direct result of the high dropout rate, which is not always driven by monetary concerns. In fact, a focused approach on technical courses might redirect

students toward productive employment, rather than pure academics.

Even though the Los Cabos municipality is mainly urban, there are several *ejidos* that comprise the rural areas of the municipality. One hundred percent of *ejido* leaders said that although they have a piece of land dedicated to a school, the property does not function as a school as it is lacking in teachers, training, materials, and often even a building.

5. Mulegé

Civic leaders in Mulegé have suggested that education is not important to young people, so much so that they would rather work than study. According to the 2000 census, the municipality was in last place for levels of professionalization, as 93% of people eighteen years and over had no professional or technical training.²³ This lack of motivation may be due to the fact that there are not enough professional jobs; therefore, education sector must provide technical and professional careers better suited to the economic activities of the region, such as those in tourism and the hospitality sector.

The city of Guerrero Negro has several key areas that need improvement in the local educational system, including teacher training, access to libraries and scholarships, professional mentoring, and adult education. Adult education is also not meeting the needs of the city's population.

The city of Santa Rosalía is combating drug trafficking and substance abuse by minors, the lack of middle and high schools relative to the demand, and the nonexistence of special education schools.

Civic leaders in the rural areas of the municipality are asking for additional schools, especially preschools.

