

# MEXICO

## ENCOURAGING PARENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORM

Against the backdrop of striking teachers shutting down transportation and blocking airports, Mexican legislators are being hailed for approving a set of powerful laws on national education reform. The country has a large public education system where the ratio of public to private elementary schools is roughly 10:1. Mexico spends more per student than most industrialized nations and yet exhibits the lowest levels of academic achievement, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2012. The laws would dismantle the stronghold of teacher's unions, which have the second highest paid education staff among OECD nations, and have so far controlled teacher hiring, promotions and competency exams.

### FEATURES OF THE INITIATIVE

It is in this landscape of reform where the digital platform [Mejora tu Escuela](#), or 'Improve Your School' has entered, seeking a greater involvement of parents in transforming the system which educates their children. Only 19 percent of parents are aware of the results their child's school obtained in the national standardized test. And yet, in an anomaly, 78 percent are satisfied with the quality of education, according to the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO), one of the civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Tripartite Technical Secretariat that oversees OGP implementation in Mexico. "Each school

has an alphanumeric code which allows parents to access information on their school in government databases, but often the school Principals don't release the code. Parents also don't know where and what kind of information to look for to make a proper assessment", says Alexandra Zapata from IMCO.

Mexico's membership to OGP opened the gateway to negotiating with the education authorities to provide data. IMCO acquired databases on standardized test results and active teaching spaces, and cross-referenced them with basic data on the schools. [Mejora tu Escuela](#) covers all public and private schools from elementary to high school level and has four main tools: (1) 'Know your school' which lets people search for a school by name or geographic location and reveals the quality of education as well as a state ranking based on test results (2) 'Compare your school' which allows comparisons with other schools by educational quality, state and national ranking, performance over time and performance of students (3) 'Grade your school' which invites the community to shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of each school and (4) 'Improve your school' which provides concrete tools and suggestions to parents on how to participate in addressing problems in their child's school.

### EARLY RESULTS

Within the first three weeks after the launch, [Mejora tu Escuela](#) had more than a million page views and around 2,500 citizens had commented on the profiles of individual schools. For example, the platform identifies schools where cheating on tests is rife or schools where the teacher's union has blocked standardized test taking. Citizen reports can also help identify schools with deteriorating infrastructure or principals that mismanage the school budget. These problems are then tied with possible solutions that can either be implemented by parents or by other CSOs working in the same community. "This information is unique because it can be evaluated by a broad spectrum of society, be it parents, public servants or CSOs. The more information you have on schools, the more likely you are to demand higher quality education", says Gabriela Segovia of the Federal Institute on Access to Information and Data Protection (IFAI).



LOGO OF MEJORA TU ESCUELA

## MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITIES

There has been a lot of work in recent years in trying to make the education databases more transparent. That IMCO and IFAI were negotiating for the databases with an OGP mandate put this initiative on high gear. It was not until several months after meeting the head of the Education Policy Planning and Evaluation Unit that the first databases were released. Before launching [Mejora tu Escuela](#) in August 2013 they presented the merits of using the databases to the Unit. Alexandra notes, “we emphasized that no matter how hard the government works, unless parents are equally involved in transforming the education system it can never be improved”. The logic in this argument was hard to ignore for the education authorities. IMCO also demonstrated other interesting facts — that contrary to expectation, some of the best schools around the country are public schools. These analyses went a long way in rationalizing the need to acquire more information from the education authorities. IMCO continued to build on this momentum even after a change in the administration in late 2013, and now works with the new head of the Unit.

“Public education is as much a political problem as it is a social problem in Mexico.”

- Gabriela Segovia,  
Federal Institute on Access to  
Information and Data Protection

## FACING CHALLENGES

Even though IMCO gained access to a large amount of information, a few important ones still remain hard to reach, such as the amount of state and federal funding for each public school, and the result of teacher evaluations. The immediate goal is to compile different kinds of data that are currently scattered, and standardize it under one umbrella portal. In the next few weeks, IMCO will be launching the API of all of the existing databases, allowing citizens to reuse and visualize the data in innovative ways. By doing this, the Ministry of Education and IMCO are placing a transformative tool in the hands of citizens and policymakers

that will help to set high standards in education. Although legislators have approved an education reform package, the laws will not have an impact unless a separate implementing law is drawn up and passed over the next six months. [Mejora tu Escuela](#) is the kind of concrete initiative that the Mexican government will need to envision in order to give its laws some teeth.

“...@MejoraTuEscuela convinced me to switch my daughters to a better school after I realized that the previous school was not as good”

- Parent comment on Twitter