



TOS Success Story--Education Got Standards?! Got Quality

How does a society begin to turn around the stark reality that only one in four children--39% of the population--completes primary school?¹ Guatemalan leaders are beginning to face this challenge which is complicated by the fact that Guatemala is a country with a very young population—49% of the population is under 18 years old—and where 25 languages are spoken.

One of the tools that leaders have available in the education reform toolbox is standards for learning; instituting these standards to elevate the quality of education has worked well in other countries. Education standards also contribute to accountability—when teachers become accountable to students, parents and authorities and authorities in turn become accountable to society.. Guatemala recently adopted the education standards tool as part of its education reform and overall efforts to improve educational accountability and quality..

So how does this tool actually work? Education standards are written publicized statements that establish clear, simple, and measurable guidelines for what all teachers must teach and what all students must know and learn to do—the content is carefully constructed so that children’s learning builds on itself in a natural progression over the school years. Furthermore, standards allow education experts to evaluate students’ and teachers’ progress as well as the effectiveness of curricula. Evaluation results guide the modification of standards when changes are deemed necessary.

Education standards are especially critical for an education system like Guatemala’s where large segments of the population, particularly rural, indigenous, girls and young women have been systematically excluded from education services. Because all teachers and all students must meet established and common expectations for learning, education systems that tend to discriminate necessarily become more equitable and deliver higher quality services.

On February 7th, 2007, the Government of Guatemala published the ministerial decree that establishes national education standards for pre-primary through sixth grades. USAID technical and financial assistance has been instrumental in this historical occurrence.

To establish education standards for the first time in Guatemala, the USAID Education Standards and Research Program collaborated with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and other education experts. The teams began by conducting a systematic consultation with students, parents, teachers and administrators throughout the country.

It was to that end that early one chilly and drizzly morning three sixth grade students from the rural San Pedro La Laguna school crossed Lake Atitlán in a small boat. Fermina Talí, Héctor Cortés, and Pablo González were bound for the University del Valle’s regional Sololá campus.

¹ Reggo, O. and Rubio, F./Juárez and Associates. “Education Indicators in Central America and Mexico for USAID.” May 2007
Reggo, O. and Rubio, F. /Juárez y Asociados. “Indicadores CAM en Educación para USAID”. Mayo 2007

They were eager with anticipation. All they knew was that they would join students from other schools for a *Consulta Nacional* on education standards. Though neither they nor their parents were sure exactly what this was all about, it sounded important and they were excited.

Once on the campus, the three students sat in the first row and watched the audiovisual presentation on education standards with rapt attention. It explained what standards are, what they look and sound like, and, most importantly to these students, what's in it for them—the value standards have for students, their families, and their teachers.

After the presentation, students broke into discussion groups led by facilitators. During this part of the national “consultation,” each group reviewed the new standards to see how understandable the language was and to delve deeper into why standards are needed and what benefits they bring. Fermina, Héctor and Pablo were enthusiastic and interested participants.

At the end of the discussion session Héctor said: *“With this all of us will learn the same things and no one will be left behind—not teachers, not students—education will improve for all of us in the country.”* Fermina chimed: *“For students like us these standards are good because now we will learn the same that kids in the (Guatemala) City learn.”*

The national consultation on education standards that these eager San Pedro La Laguna students dedicated their day to was conducted by the USAID Standards Program in all of Guatemala’s 22 departments in rural and urban areas in May and June 2006. The consultation consisted of 45 workshops with 1,150 students, parents, teachers, authorities and civil society organization representatives.

Delfo Cetino, a currículum specialist from the MOE Education Quality and Development office (DICADE), said of the consultation: *“This support from USAID and the MOE is what we have been waiting for to help us get education in Guatemala up to par with other countries. The assistance is welcome because Guatemala needs it. Education standards are essential factors for education reform here because they are the umbrella we need to develop all the curriculum content.”*



Children hold new Education Standards for first time in the history of Guatemala. AArreaga/USAID.2006