



EN
COR
TO

REVEALING THE CONDITIONS OF TEACHING IN UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Situation and Challenges in Teacher Training and Professionalization

Gustavo Armando Hernández López

Introduction

Substantive improvement of Upper Secondary Education (EMS)¹ in Mexico requires acknowledging that the structural challenges faced by teachers—in terms of training, working conditions, and professional development regulations—cannot be addressed through fragmented or short-term solutions.

Upper Secondary Education occupies a strategic place within the Mexican educational system, as it constitutes a level with its own identity in which the cognitive, identity-related, and social transition of young people takes shape. High expectations are placed on this level: it is expected to prepare students to continue their professional education, but also to equip them to enter the workforce. This dual vocation—both preparatory and terminal—makes its educational purposes more complex.

In this context, teaching in EMS faces a training demand that involves professional, labor, and—more recently—socio-emotional dimensions. Teachers are expected to accompany young people at a key stage of personal development, while also delivering specialized content and supporting the development of

socio-emotional, cognitive, and technical skills. However, unlike basic education, the institutional pathway for teacher training and professionalization in this educational level presents unique conditions that are seldom addressed, which make it more complex and about which little is known.

In the midst of a series of educational policy proposals concerning EMS, this article seeks to contribute to the public discussion on the conditions of teachers in this educational level and, by analyzing structural aspects of EMS, reveal the critical points regarding the challenges that the current administration faces concerning the professional development of its teachers.

Understanding the complexities of teacher training, access, and professional development is essential to strengthening educational quality and ensuring an EMS that responds to the needs of students and society.

¹ We retain the acronym EMS, that stands for Educación Media Superior while using the full term in its translated form: Upper Secondary Education.



1. Upper Secondary Education in Mexico: Teaching Within a Diverse and Complex Institutional Framework

Upper Secondary Education (EMS) in Mexico is a strategic level of the national educational system whose relevance goes beyond the traditional idea of being merely a bridge between basic and higher education, as it is the level where the identity, cognitive, and social transition of millions of young people is defined. According to the Ministry of Public Education (SEP, by its acronym in Spanish), the Mexican educational system serves 34,809,298 students, of whom 5,508,572 are enrolled in EMS. This student population is distributed across 21,249 schools, with 85% publicly funded and 15% privately funded, and with a gender distribution of 52% women and 48% men (SEP, 2024).

Although the origins of intermediate educational services in Mexico date back to the sixteenth century (SEP, 2025), EMS as an articulated system is a relatively recent construction, the result of accelerated transformation processes that sought to bring unity to a historically fragmented level. Its roots lie, on the one hand, in university preparatory schools and high schools, where teachers from higher education “introduced” young people to the university world; and on the other, in the formation of the federal subsystem within SEP, which emerged

after the separation of technical programs from IPN and later expanded into various educational modalities. The convergence of these traditions—university-based and technological—constitutes a fundamental part of the origins of EMS in Mexico.

One of the key milestones was the 2008 Integral Reform of Upper Secondary Education (RIEMS), which established the National Upper Secondary Education System and the first competency-based Common Curricular Framework (MCC, by its acronym in Spanish). This change represented, for the first time, an effort to establish foundations for articulation among authorities at this educational level and to provide common elements for training in a level characterized by institutional and pedagogical diversity.

Subsequently, the 2012 constitutional reform incorporated EMS as part of compulsory education, strengthening its role within the national educational trajectory. This formal inclusion implied the recognition of upper secondary education as an integrated system with specific objectives for the training of young people.

More recently, in the 2023–2024 school year, under the proposal of the New Mexican School (also known as NEM), the federal administration promoted a new transformation through the Common Curricular Framework for Upper

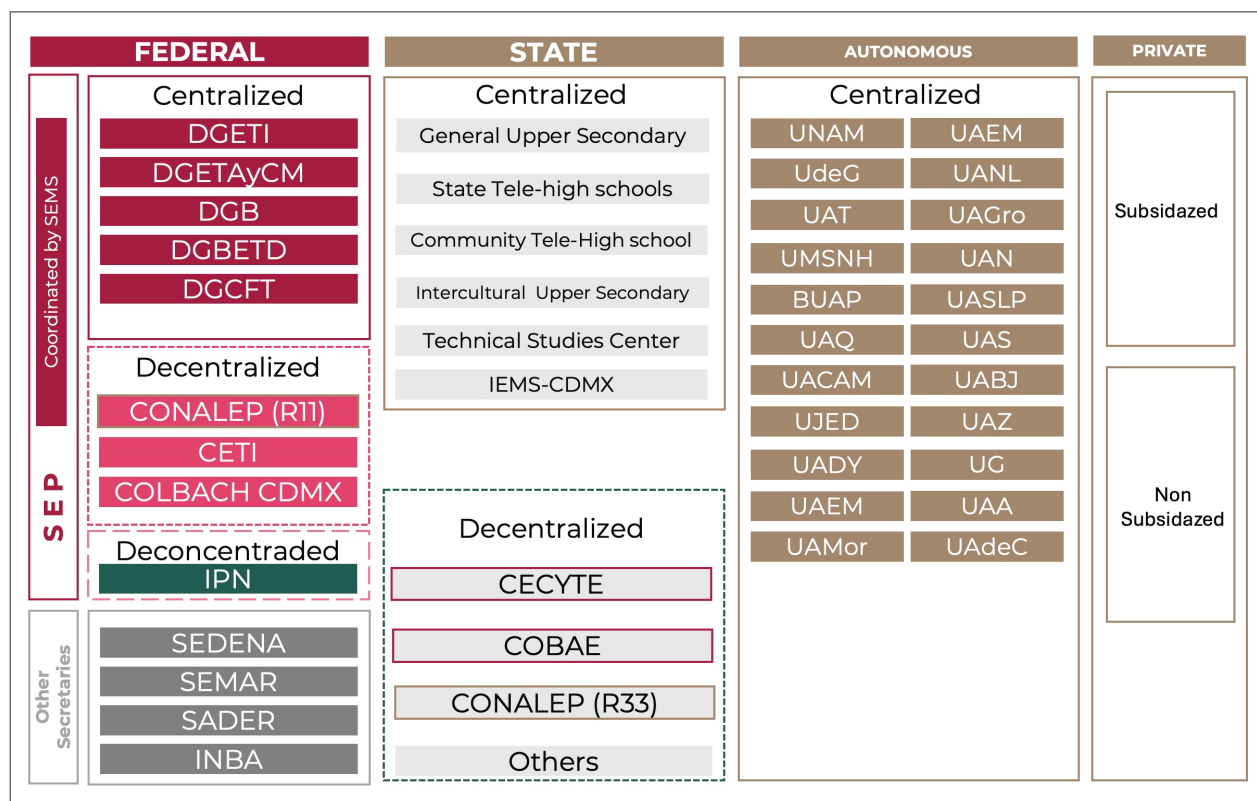


Secondary Education (MCCEMS, by its acronym in Spanish), with the purpose of reorienting pedagogical approaches and strengthening the integral formation of students.

This evolution has taken place within a highly fragmented organizational context. Even though the Ministry of Public Education (SEP)

recognizes the existence of 31 EMS subsystems (SEP, 2025), when elements such as the degree of autonomy, legal personality, financing schemes, and administrative structures are considered, more than 150 different forms of organizing educational services at this level can be identified.

Figure 1. Upper Secondary Education Subsystems in Mexico



Source: Own elaboration with information from SEP (2019).



This structure includes subsystems centralized under the federal Ministry of Public Education (SEP), such as:

- Centers for Technological Agricultural Upper Secondary Education,
- Centers for Technological Industrial and Services Upper Secondary Education,
- Centers for Upper Secondary Studies,
- Technological Upper Secondary Schools for Education and Sports Promotion.

Another group is made up of the state subsystems, such as:

- General upper secondary programs,
- Technological upper secondary programs,
- Digital upper secondary programs,
- Telebachilleratos (Tele-High School Programs)
- Intercultural upper secondary programs,
- Distance upper secondary programs.

There are also decentralized institutions, such as:

- Colleges of Scientific and Technological Studies,
- Colleges of Upper Secondary Education,
- National College of Technical Professional Education.

Finally, this structure includes programs offered by public and autonomous universities, such as the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN, by its acronym in Spanish) .

The coexistence of multiple subsystems, models, regulatory frameworks, and authorities has

generated diversified governance in which differing administrative criteria, working conditions, and institutional priorities converge—all of which have deep implications for teacher development.

As can be seen, the professional practice of teaching in EMS develops within an environment characterized by institutional diversity, varied labor regulations, and a multiplicity of training offerings. This situation not only affects teachers' career trajectories, but also the possibilities of building a solid and articulated professional identity.

2. Being a Teacher in EMS: From Initial Training to Professional Development

The teaching function in EMS in Mexico unfolds within a complex network of institutional, regulatory, and training conditions that shape a heterogeneous professional profile.

The EMS teaching workforce is composed of 425,826 teachers, of whom 50.5% are women and 49.5% are men. Of this total, 42% work in state-run schools, 23.8% in federal schools, 23% in private institutions, and 11% in autonomous bodies (SEP, 2024).

Unlike basic education, EMS in Mexico does not have an initial teacher training system. While teacher preparation in basic education is grounded in an institutionalized regulatory system—mandatory and provided in



TEACHING IN EMS

Gustavo Armando
Hernández López

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
DECEMBER 2025 / NUM 6

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

state-regulated specialized schools such as Teacher's College—EMS lacks equivalent structures. Initial training specific to this level is scarce, dispersed, and not institutionalized; there are few higher education programs nationwide that prepare future teachers to work in this educational segment. Among the few that exist are those offered by the National Pedagogical University, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM, by its acronym in Spanish), and some private universities. Moreover, unlike most Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries (2024), training in teaching is not an obligatory qualification for entry into EMS teaching positions in Mexico.

Teachers in EMS come predominantly from diverse professional disciplines. Approximately 48.3% hold a bachelor's degree and 46.2% have completed postgraduate studies, mainly in fields such as social sciences, administration, law, and the exact sciences (MEJOREDU, 2023). This profile reflects strong disciplinary training, but not necessarily the pedagogical and didactic preparation essential for educational processes.

Given this scenario, continuous training has been conceived as the main mechanism to provide teachers with pedagogical tools. Since 2008, following the Integral Reform of Upper Secondary Education (RIEMS, by its acronym in Spanish), national programs such as PROFORDEMS (Teacher Training Program) and CERTIDEMS (Upper Secondary Education Teacher Certification Program) were launched to

professionalize teachers in common teaching competencies across all subsystems.

Currently, the continuous training offered by SEP for EMS is implemented through the Professional Teacher Development Program (PRODEP, by its acronym in Spanish) for Upper Secondary Education, operated by the Undersecretariat of Upper Secondary Education (SEMS, by its acronym in Spanish).

The Professional Teacher Development Program aims to strengthen the profile required for the performance of full-time teachers, teaching staff, technical teaching staff, and personnel with management, supervisory, or technical-pedagogical advisory functions in basic, upper secondary, and higher education, as well as academic bodies in public higher education institutions, through training programs, academic updating, capacity building, and/or research projects that ensure equal opportunities for women and men.

In EMS, the program has two objectives:

1. To contribute to strengthening the knowledge and skills required for the performance of teaching staff, technical teaching staff, personnel with management positions, and supervisory staff in Public EMS Institutions (IPEMS, by its acronym in Spanish) under equal conditions for women and men through training mechanisms; and



TEACHING IN EMS

Gustavo Armando
Hernández López

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
DECEMBER 2025 / NUM 6

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

2. To support IPEMS in the academic follow-up of teaching staff, technical teaching staff, personnel with management functions, and supervisory personnel enrolled in training mechanisms through the continuous training platform.

In 2024, through this program, 7.9% of the national teaching workforce was served in an online modality through 29 training actions carried out in collaboration with higher education institutions (SEP, 2024). While this represents a valuable institutional effort, it also highlights limitations in coverage—especially considering that the implementation of MCCEMS began in 2023 and that 45.9% of EMS schools lack internet access (SEP, 2024).

Additionally, state educational authorities and decentralized bodies develop various training strategies and offerings autonomously and with their own resources. At the same time, public and private higher education institutions have emerged as key actors in providing educational options for teachers, thus expanding the range of possibilities to meet training needs.

Within this context, two broad national catalogs have been compiled: one focused on didactic and pedagogical training, containing more than 3,900 offerings; and another on extracurricular training (referring to courses, certifications, and training experiences that complement initial academic preparation), which includes more than 11,300 proposals (SEP, 2024). However, this multiplicity of training offerings, far from

guaranteeing effective responses to teachers' needs, poses serious challenges in terms of quality, relevance, and articulation. The absence of homogeneous national criteria to regulate and evaluate these programs creates a fragmented landscape in which training trajectories may lack coherence, impact, and institutional recognition.

This situation reveals a structural problem: diversification of the training supply does not necessarily translate into better conditions for teacher professionalization. On the contrary, it may deepen inequalities if clear mechanisms ensuring minimum standards of quality, monitoring, and evaluation of in-service teacher training are not in place.

In addition to the lack of initial teacher training and the fragmentation of continuous training, contractual heterogeneity further complicates the landscape, with permanent positions, interim appointments, temporary contracts, and non-standardized categories coexisting—contractual categories that are not comparable across subsystems. This affects job stability and the possibilities for professional development.

Given the teacher shortage expected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2024), it is pertinent to reflect on the conditions governing entry into EMS teaching in Mexico, as well as the challenges associated with the age structure of the teaching workforce at this level. The age composition of EMS teachers is intermediate and mature: 61.7% are between 29 and 48



years old, 30% are over 49, and only 8% are between 18 and 28. This raises questions about generational renewal and the sustainability of the teaching corps (MEJOREDU, 2023).

Teacher professionalization in EMS has undergone significant regulatory changes. Until 2012, the selection of teaching staff, as well as vertical promotion processes (to managerial or supervisory positions) and horizontal promotion (such as the assignment of additional teaching hours or changes in category), were characterized by notable heterogeneity. These processes were subject to the particular rules of each subsystem or state, resulting in substantial disparities in criteria for recruitment, evaluation, and recognition.

This regulatory diversity, far from being a contextualized response to local needs, highlighted the absence of an articulated national policy to ensure equitable and transparent conditions for teacher professional development.

In 2013, with the implementation of the Professional Teaching Service (SPD, by its acronym in Spanish), recruitment, promotion, and recognition processes in the educational system began to be regulated at the national level, aiming to establish standardized suitability criteria for entry into the service and for promotion. This regulation sought to homogenize procedures for hiring new teaching positions and for advancement to managerial or supervisory roles, as well as to regulate salary improvement mechanisms through category

changes or the assignment of additional hours. A criticism of the development of this professionalization process within EMS is that it did not take into account the specific characteristics of this educational level; the processes were equated with those of basic education, and the mechanisms for improving income were tied to permanence evaluations.

In 2019, this system was replaced by the System for the Teaching Career (SCMM, by its acronym in Spanish), a multifactor evaluation model that maintained national criteria for assessment while incorporating additional factors such as teaching experience, pedagogical training, and extracurricular preparation, all of which contributed to the final result. However, although its design and implementation sought to address the diversity of EMS by contextualizing certain elements, in 2024 its elimination was announced, and there is still no clarity regarding the new framework that will govern teacher recruitment and promotion in EMS.

In summary, the teaching profession in Upper Secondary Education in Mexico is shaped by a series of structural tensions that hinder the consolidation of a solid, relevant, and socially valued professional profile. The absence of a specific initial training system for the level, the dispersion of continuous training offerings, the regulatory heterogeneity in recruitment and promotion processes, and contractual instability all reveal a weak institutionalization of professional development for teachers at this educational stage.



TEACHING IN EMS

Gustavo Armando
Hernández López

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
DECEMBER 2025 / NUM 6

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

This structural precariousness not only affects the quality of teaching but also directly impacts working conditions, professional motivation, and teacher retention within the system.

3. Teachers as a Key Figure to Strengthen the Quality of EMS

In a system characterized by organizational diversity, regulatory heterogeneity, and weak institutionalization of specific teacher policies, it is necessary to build a path toward integral transformation that positions the teaching profession as a strategic pillar of the level. Based on the preceding panorama, the following perspectives may contribute to the development of policies that improve teachers' working and professional conditions.

1. Initial Teacher Training for EMS

One of the system's most serious structural gaps is the absence of professionalized and mandatory initial training for teaching in EMS. In this scenario, it would be advisable to initiate a public conversation on the creation of a national system of initial teacher training for EMS—one that identifies and articulates bachelor's or postgraduate programs oriented toward teaching at this level, taking into account its pedagogical, curricular, and sociocultural particularities, while also integrating disciplinary training with didactic and pedagogical components specific to adolescence and youth.

This would help consolidate entry profiles into EMS teaching positions and strengthen the

development of professionals with identity and a sense of belonging.

2. Continuous Training Pathways

The existence of a broad yet poorly articulated set of training offerings has created a landscape of dispersion and inequity. Teacher professionalization cannot depend solely on local institutional will or individual effort; it must be conceived as a responsibility of the State. A national continuous training system for EMS could guide the establishment of minimum criteria for quality, relevance, evaluation, and certification of training programs—both public and private—articulate teacher training pathways, promote the efficient use of federal and state funding, and recognize as well as leverage the technical and operational capacities of state authorities and decentralized bodies.

3. Initial and Continuous Training with a Focus on Youth Development

Teaching in EMS requires understanding that students are in a complex transitional stage: they are no longer children, but not yet fully formed adults; they enter as adolescents and graduate as citizens and workers who will take part in the country's social and productive life. In this process, their socio-emotional development is crucial for their permanence, well-being, and future. Therefore, any proposal for initial training must include not only disciplinary and didactic strengthening, but also pedagogical components tailored to youth and socio-emotional intervention—allowing teachers to develop



skills to support the identity, emotional, and social processes characteristic of this stage.

4. Regulatory Framework for Recruitment and Professional Development

In a context in which the regulatory framework on recruitment, promotion, and professional recognition processes disappears, uncertainty increases, discouraging teacher retention and hindering the consolidation of a professional teaching career. For this reason, it is urgent to place on the public agenda the design of a new national teacher career model for EMS—one that responds to fundamental principles such as equity and operational and structural diversity, without abandoning common criteria of transparency and merit, as well as stability and professional development.

This discussion should consider the working conditions of teachers currently in service and the conditions needed to attract future generations to the profession.

5. Governance and Interinstitutional Coordination

The organizational complexity of EMS demands a robust governance system capable of

overcoming current fragmentation and promoting shared responsibility among the federal government, states, subsystems, and decentralized bodies. It is necessary to revitalize and strengthen the technical capacities of institutions such as the National System of Upper Secondary Education (SINEMS, by its acronym in Spanish) and the State Commissions for Planning and Programming of Upper Secondary Education (CEPPEMS, by its acronym in Spanish), so that they serve as effective platforms for coordination, planning, and evaluation of teacher policies.

In sum, the structural challenges faced by teachers in Upper Secondary Education are neither merely operational nor temporary; they stem from a historical configuration of institutional disarticulation, a lack of specific policies, and accumulated inequalities. Overcoming this situation requires recognizing teachers as strategic actors for strengthening the educational level, rather than merely functional resources. The consolidation of a high-quality, equitable, and relevant EMS demands a comprehensive rethinking of the frameworks governing teacher recruitment, training, and professional development.



TEACHING IN EMS

Gustavo Armando
Hernández López

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
DECEMBER 2025 / NUM 6

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the conditions of teachers in Upper Secondary Education (EMS) in Mexico reveals an institutional framework marked by fragmentation, regulatory disarticulation, and the absence of a comprehensive policy for teacher professional development. Despite its strategic nature within the national educational system and the current educational policy, this level still lacks solid mechanisms to ensure specific initial training, articulated continuous training, equitable working conditions, and clear, recognized professional pathways.

The absence of an institutionalized system of initial teacher training, the dispersion of continuous training offerings, and the regulatory uncertainty regarding teacher recruitment and promotion create a scenario that not only precarizes the professional practice of teaching, but also compromises educational quality

and the right of students to receive relevant and comprehensive education.

Strengthening EMS from the perspective of its teaching workforce therefore requires moving beyond partial solutions and advancing toward a structural transformation that recognizes teachers as key actors in the construction of an inclusive, relevant, and high-quality upper secondary education. To achieve this, it is essential to build a coherent institutional framework supported by public policies that articulate training, professionalization, and stability, under an educational governance model that promotes effective coordination among levels of government, subsystems, and involved actors. Only then will it be possible to consolidate an educational model that responds to the challenges of the present and future, and that grants the teaching profession the strategic place it deserves in the educational and social life of the country.



References

National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions. (2023). Upper Secondary Education Teacher Certification Program (CERTIDEMS).
<https://www.anuies.mx/programas-y-proyectos/programa-de-certificacion-docente-del-nivel-medio-superior-certidems>

National Commission for the Continuous Improvement of Education. (2023). Upper secondary education teachers: sociodemographic, professional, and institutional characteristics.
https://www.mejoredu.gob.mx/images/publicaciones/las_y_los_docentes_de_ems_cspci_informe.pdf

Mexicanos Primero. (n.d.). Monitoring of the Education System.
<https://www.mexicanosprimero.org/monito/index.php?idEntidad=0>

Ministry of Economy. (n.d.). Middle and higher education teachers. Data México.
<https://www.economia.gob.mx/datamexico/es/profile/occupation/profesores-de-nivel-medio-y-superior>

Ministry of Public Education. (2024). Statistics 2024. Professional Teacher Development Program (PRODEP).
https://prodep.desarrolloprofesionaldocente.sems.gob.mx/estadistica/estadistica_2024.pdf

Ministry of Public Education. (2024). Main statistics of the national education system. 2023–2024 school year. Pocket version.
https://www.planeacion.sep.gob.mx/Doc/estadistica_e_indicadores/principales_cifras/principales_cifras_2023_2024_bolsillo.pdf

Ministry of Public Education. (2024). Main statistics of the national education system. 2023–2024 school year.
https://www.planeacion.sep.gob.mx/Doc/estadistica_e_indicadores/principales_cifras/principales_cifras_2023_2024.pdf

Ministry of Public Education. (2025, February 28). Agreement number 14/02/25 issuing the Operating Rules of the Professional Teacher Development Program for fiscal year 2025. Official Gazette of the Federation.
https://dof.gob.mx/index_111.php?day=28&month=02&year=2025

Ministry of Public Education. (n.d.). Background of the DGB. Directorate General of the Baccalaureate.
https://educacionmediasuperior.sep.gob.mx/es_mx/sems/antecedentes_dgb

Ministry of Public Education. (n.d.). Teacher Training Program (PROFORDEMS). Undersecretariat of Upper Secondary Education. https://educacionmediasuperior.sep.gob.mx/es/sems/programacion_de_formacion_docente

OECD. (2024). Education at a Glance 2024: OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing.
<https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41728&filter=Secondary>

UNESCO. (2024). Global Report on Teachers: Addressing the teacher shortage and transforming the profession.
<https://www.unesco.org/es/articles/informe-mundial-sobre-el-personal-docente-afrontar-la-escasez-de-docentes-y-transformar-la-profesion>

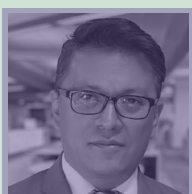


TEACHING IN EMS

Gustavo Armando
Hernández López

MEXICANOS PRIMERO
DECEMBER 2025 / NUM 6

EN CORTO
EDUCATIONAL POLICY BRIEF



Gustavo Armando Hernández López

Doctoral candidate in Education at the Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla;

holds a Master's degree in Education Quality from the Universidad de las Américas Puebla and a Bachelor's degree in Natural Sciences from the Escuela Normal del Estado de Puebla. His academic background has focused on the analysis of educational policies, the improvement of teaching quality, and the strategic management of educational systems, consolidating a solid trajectory in research, planning, and institutional development.

In the professional sphere, he has held positions at the federal and state levels, including roles in the Federal Ministry of Public Education (SEP), the Governing Board of the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEE), Head of the Unit for Teacher Professional Development at SEP Puebla, and State Coordinator of the Professional Teaching Service. He also has extensive teaching experience in basic education and higher education. He has served as a consultant for UNESCO and has collaborated in the development of regulations for the System for the Career of Teachers.

MEXICANOS PRIMERO is a civil society organization that advocates for ensuring the right to learn for children and youth by driving improvements in Mexico's education policy.



www.mexicanosprimero.org