

Empowering Parents to Improve Education Quality in Rural Mexico

Paul Gertler, Harry Anthony Patrinos, Eduardo Rodríguez-Oreggia

Location: Mexican states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Puebla, and Yucatán

Sample: 250 schools

Timeline:
2007 to 2010

Partners:
Mexico, Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo (CONAFE)

Rural areas are more likely than urban areas to have inadequate public services, poor infrastructure and housing conditions, and limited economic and educational opportunities. In rural Mexico, researchers investigated whether giving parents more control over grants to support local schools could improve student learning, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Preliminary results suggest that doubling grants to parent associations modestly reduced dropout rates and substantially increased test scores.

Policy Issue: Around the world, there are often large disparities in wealth and opportunity between rural and urban areas. Those in rural areas often face inadequate delivery of public services, poor infrastructure and housing conditions, and fewer economic and educational opportunities. In an effort to improve service delivery in disadvantaged rural areas, many governments and NGOs are decentralizing education decision-making and increasing parental and community involvement in schools. Local administration and oversight puts power into the hands of those with the most interest in seeing improvements and the best information about current education quality and the needs of the community. In the past decade, numerous

countries including Burkina Faso, France, India, Kenya, Madagascar, and Mali have adopted community-based management policies. But despite such enthusiasm for participation programs, the existing evidence on their success in improving learning is mixed, and little is known about the mechanisms that drive successful programs.

Context of the Evaluation: Mexico faces a wide disparity in education performance between urban and rural schools, and the problem of poor achievement is particularly pronounced for the rural, indigenous population. Mexico has one of the largest and most diverse indigenous populations in Latin America, with 12.7 million indigenous people speaking a total of 62 languages.¹ The majority of the indigenous population lives in small, rural communities, most of which are located in the poorer southern states.

In an effort to improve educational performance in rural areas, and between indigenous and non-indigenous populations, in 1971, the Mexican government created Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo (CONAFE, or the National Council of Education Development) to provide extra resources to schools that enrolled disadvantaged students.

The components of CONAFE include recruiting and training community instructors to teach in marginalized communities; the development of curricula and textbooks in both Spanish and local indigenous languages to facilitate bilingual education; and improvements to school infrastructure.² An additional component of the program, called Apoyo a la Gesti3n Escolar (AGE, or Support to School Management), provides monetary support and training for local parent associations, which receive US\$500-700 per year to invest in educational materials or infrastructure improvements of their choosing.

Existing qualitative evidence suggests that the AGE program has increased parents' participation and commitment to their children's education, and has subsequently led to a reduction in the drop out rate. However, little is known about the mechanisms through which community-based management affects student performance.

Details of the Intervention: Researchers used a randomized evaluation to examine the mechanisms through which the AGE program might affect education quality and student learning.

From the full list of AGE schools in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Puebla, and Yucat3n, researchers selected 250 rural primary schools and then randomly divided them in to a treatment and comparison group. To estimate the impact of different grant amounts, researchers compared the performance of treatment schools whose parent association received double the normal grant during that time period to comparison schools whose parent association received the normal grant (US\$500-700 per year).

In order to estimate the impact of the training component of AGE, researchers randomly selected an additional 150 schools from the total population of indigenous primary schools in the same four states, and assigned half to receive the training component but no grant, and the other half to the comparison group, which received no training or financial support.

Results and Policy Lessons: *Effect of grant size:* Preliminary analysis indicates that doubling the cash grant to parent associations decreased the average dropout rate across grades 1-6 by 1.6 percentage points in the first year and 0.6 percentage points in the third year. However, there was no significant change in grade repetition. Increasing the size of the cash grant also significantly improved test scores in both Spanish and mathematics, with an average increase in

combined scores of 0.28 standard deviations at the end of the first year and 0.21 standard deviations at the end of the third year, compared to schools that received the base AGE grant. Interviews with parents, teachers, and school principals suggest that the additional grant led to increased commitment and participation of parents.

Impact of training: Training parent associations seems to have had no impact on grade repetition or the drop out rate, on average. However, after only one year, students in schools in which the parent association received training saw an average increase in combined test scores of 0.43 standard deviations, compared to students in schools where parents did not receive training.

¹ UNHCR. "World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Mexico: Indigenous peoples." Minority Rights Group International, 2008. Accessed March 8, 2013. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/49749ce423.html>

² "CONAFE," accessed March 8, 2013, www.conafe.gob.mx/

Related Papers Citations: *Gertler, Paul, Harry Anthony Patrinos, and Eduardo Rodriguez-Oreggia. "Parental Empowerment in Mexico: Randomized Experiment of the Apoyos a La Gesti3n Escolar (AGE)' in Rural Primary Schools in Mexico." Working Paper, August 2012.*

Visit this page online for links to related research, news, videos, and more:

<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/empowering-parents-improve-education-quality-rural-mexico>

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a network of 194 affiliated professors from 62 universities. Our mission is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. We engage with hundreds of partners around the world to conduct rigorous research, build capacity, share policy lessons, and scale up effective programs. J-PAL was launched at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and now has regional offices in Africa, Europe, Latin America & the Caribbean, North America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. For more information visit povertyactionlab.org.