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FEATURED Q&A

What Does the Future Hold for Mexico's Schools?



Former teachers' union leader Elba Esther Gordillo has voiced support for rolling back some parts of Mexico's education reforms. // File Photo: Notimex.

Q The controversial former leader of Mexico's SNTE teachers' union, Elba Esther Gordillo, on Aug. 20 said she supported President-elect Andrés Manuel López Obrador's plans to roll back some education reforms that were implemented during current President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration. Where did Peña Nieto's education reforms fall short? Will López Obrador return to the education system that was in place before Peña Nieto's reforms, or will he introduce new changes? What role do teachers' unions play in Mexican society today, and how are other stakeholders shaping the education debate?

A Javier Treviño, Mexico's deputy minister of education: "As the OECD recognized in its education policy outlook, Mexico's educational performance has evidently improved in recent years. Nevertheless, when President Enrique Peña Nieto took office in December 2012, it was clear that our country faced many challenges. Although in recent years Mexico conducted a systematic expansion of educational services, reaching almost universal enrollment in primary and lower secondary education, as well as significant advances in pre-school and upper secondary education, this effort proved insufficient in terms of quality and equitable access to education. The education reform that was passed in Mexico began with a constitutional amendment and the amendment of the General Law of Education, the enactment of the Law for the National Institute for Educational Evaluation and the approval of the General Professional Teaching Service Law. The

Continued on page 2

TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Guatemalan President Bars CICIG Head From Returning

Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales barred Iván Velásquez, the head of the U.N. anti-corruption panel in the country, from returning to Guatemala.

Page 2

ECONOMIC

Economists See Deepening Recession in Argentina

In the latest central bank survey, economists said they expected the country's recession to worsen with a 1.9 percent economic contraction this year.

Page 3

POLITICAL

Prosecutors Charge Likely Workers' Party Candidate

Brazilian prosecutors charged Fernando Haddad, the likely presidential candidate of the Workers' Party, with corruption.

Page 2



Haddad // File Photo: Haddad Campaign.

POLITICAL NEWS

Likely Candidate of Brazil's Workers' Party Charged

Fernando Haddad, a former mayor of São Paulo and the likely presidential candidate of the leftist Workers' Party, was charged Tuesday with corruption, O Estado de S. Paulo reported. Haddad is expected to replace popular former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, whom a judge barred last Friday from running in the country's October election following his conviction and jailing on graft charges. The accusations against Haddad stem from a payment that the Workers' Party allegedly accepted from Haddad to cover a \$2.6 million debt that he accrued in 2012 during his campaign for mayor of São Paulo, the Financial Times reported. The money is alleged to have come from UTC Engenharia, a construction company. Prosecutors have claimed that a black market money dealer, Alberto Youssef, laundered the

money. Youssef's testimony has been at the foundation of the massive Operation Car Wash corruption probe, which has lasted for four years. "There was a scheme of payments and money transfers in order to disguise the origin" of the money, the prosecutor's office said. Haddad has denied wrongdoing, and his office called the allegations against him "surprising in an electoral period" and "without proof." The charges are expected to introduce further uncertainty into the presidential race. [Editor's note: See [Q&A](#) on Brazil's presidential election in the Aug. 10 issue of the Advisor.]

Countries to Allow Venezuelans in With Expired Documents

Eleven Latin American nations said in a joint declaration on Tuesday that they will allow Venezuelan migrants with expired traveling documents to enter their countries, EFE reported. The announcement comes after migration officials from 13 countries met for two days in

NEWS BRIEFS

Guatemalan President Bars CICIG's Head From Returning to Country

Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales said Tuesday that his government would bar Iván Velásquez, the head of the United Nations International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG, from returning to the country, The New York Times reported. Velásquez left Guatemala on Monday for meetings in Washington and New York. Morales' announcement came four days after he said he would not renew the mandate of the panel, which has targeted his government in probes.

Brazilian President Seeks Funding to Rebuild Museum

Brazilian President Michel Temer on Monday said the government is looking for funding from companies and banks to finance the reconstruction of the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, which was gutted in a fire over the weekend, BBC News reported. The government has budgeted an initial \$3.6 million to restore the museum. Almost 90 percent of the entire collection is feared to have been destroyed in Sunday's fire, which museum officials have said resulted from years of underfunding.

Mexico's Guajardo Hoping for U.S.-Canada Deal by Friday

Mexican Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo, who leads Mexico's delegation in the North American Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the United States and Canada, said on Tuesday that he hoped U.S. and Canadian officials will be able to reach a deal by Friday, Guajardo told Mexican radio, Reuters reported. He added that the timeline after that day would become more complicated. U.S. and Canadian negotiators are scheduled to meet today for the latest NAFTA talks in Washington.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

key of the reform was to incorporate, as a constitutional right, quality education for all. This introduced two key requirements for the Mexican state: quality—evidently—and equity. Above all, the reform established that school should be at the very center of the educational system, and that the work of all the authorities should focus on strengthening their autonomy and ability to perform the task of forming well-prepared citizens. To ensure quality, it was decided that it was necessary to review the whole educational model, including the curriculum, its plans, programs, methods and pedagogy. The reform underscores the central work of teachers. Thus, one of its main aspects is addressing the need to improve teachers' professional development. This would be achieved through merit and knowledge, and the creation of the professional teaching service, which includes competitive examinations for admission, transparent processes

for promotion and retention, as well as training mechanisms for continuous professional development. A reform of this magnitude requires continuity, perseverance, discipline, focus and alignment in its implementation so we can see results in the learning process of our children."

A David Calderón, co-founder and executive president of Mexicanos Primero: "Peña Nieto's reforms fell short in two major ways. First, there were design problems in terms of temporal sequence. The law, approved in 2013, established a compulsory assessment for teaching performance before putting in place an adequate system of technical support for every school. While evaluations started in 2014, the support system today is only functional in six out of the country's 32 states. Second, the dissemination of the intended changes was

Continued on page 4

Quito to discuss the humanitarian crisis that, according to the United Nations, has driven some 2.3 million Venezuelans to leave their country in the past three years, as it spirals into economic collapse. The declaration, whose signatories include Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, also urged Venezuela to accelerate the issuing of passports, among other points. Obtaining passports and other official documents including birth and marriage certificates in Venezuela is difficult and expensive, with Venezuelans bribing authorities with up to \$5,000 for a traveling document, BBC News reported. In August, Peru and Ecuador had begun requiring valid passports to allow the entry of Venezuelans, a move that an Ecuadorean court later blocked in that country. The Venezuelan government launched a plan for Venezuelans to "return to the homeland," with President Nicolás Maduro offering to airlift migrants seeking to come back as they face harsh conditions and xenophobia abroad, the Associated Press reported. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Aug. 24 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Economists Expect Worsening Recession in Argentina

Economists in the most recent Argentine central bank survey say they expect the country's economic situation to worsen this year amid a currency crisis, Bloomberg News reported. In the latest monthly survey, which was published Tuesday, economists expected the economy to contract 1.9 percent this year, as compared to the previous forecast of a 0.3 percent contraction. The economists surveyed also expect inflation to end the year at 40.3 percent. Argentine Economy Minister Nicolás Dujovne said Tuesday after meeting in Washington with International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde that Argentina will have to wait until later this month to learn if the IMF will agree to the early release of a credit line under a \$50 billion backup financing deal that was approved earlier this year.

BUSINESS NEWS

BHP Billiton Buys 6% Stake in SolGold

Anglo-Australian multinational miner BHP Billiton has bought a 6 percent stake in Australian mining company SolGold, which is developing the Cascabel copper and gold project in northern Ecuador, the Financial Times reported Wednesday. The \$35 million stake will give BHP a share in the Ecuadorean exploration project, which the company's chief executive, Andrew Mackenzie, called "highly prospective,"

Reuters reported. "Consistent with our positive long-term outlook, copper is a key exploration focus for BHP as we seek to replenish our resource base and grow this important business," Mackenzie said, the newspaper reported. Mining companies are moving to increase their access to copper, as demand for the metal is expected to surpass supply beginning in 2020. Ecuador's untapped reserves have become a key location for exploration. SolGold had previously rejected an offer from BHP Billiton to buy a 10 percent stake two years ago, favoring instead Melbourne, Australia-headquartered miner Newcrest, which now owns a 15 percent stake in SolGold.

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in Latin America and the Caribbean

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FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 2

done in the old, authoritarian way: too many TV spots, the federal minister taking all the credit of the initial gains for himself and blaming the states' governments for every failure, and a harsh dismissal of criticism from civil society organizations. López Obrador has made a very adamant yet fuzzy promise. In my opinion, and listening to his minister-to-be, their bet will be to issue a new law regarding the teaching profession, overriding Peña Nieto's, which will aim for in-service assessments to be for diagnosis and support only, while continuing with merit-based open competition for new positions and promotions. It is likely that teachers' unions will have a strong role in the next administration, and it is very likely that the dissenting wing—the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación teachers' union, or CNTE—will clash again with López Obrador, since a new law will not appease their expectations for rent capture. For now, the private sector has been silent, and a few civil society organizations will likely take on the watchdog role, with the challenge of doing so with rigor and eloquence."

A **Marco Fernández, professor at the school of government at Tecnológico de Monterrey and researcher at México Evalúa:**

"President Peña Nieto's education reforms promised to tackle three main problems of Mexico's education system: its low quality mirrored in poor learning achievements by most students in public and private schools; the inequality in access to opportunities; and its fragile inclusive policies for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including students with disabilities and students from indigenous communities with limited knowledge of Spanish. With a merit-based teachers' system, authorities promised to improve the quality and conditions under which teachers conducted their work. The government introduced three types of teachers' evaluations: an exam to select the best candidates to enter the public teaching system; an evaluation for teachers aspiring

to become principals or superintendents; and the most controversial, a mandatory performance evaluation for already qualified teachers at all levels. Among many implementation failures, authorities did not fulfill their promise to provide teachers with quali-

“**Authorities did not fulfill their promise to provide teachers with quality training courses.**”

— **Marco Fernández**

ty training courses. Multiple studies of other policies, including the allocation of tablets for students and a fragmented system of scholarships, have shown authorities' limited evidence-based decisions. The reforms came about after the government promised to curb corruption and to retake control of the education system, which had been largely captured by the SNTE. The government imprisoned Elba Esther Gordillo, its leader and an extremely powerful political broker for the past 23 years. She was firmly opposed to Peña Nieto's reforms. Last month, a judge dismissed the accusation against Gordillo. Now that she is free, she is looking to retake control of the SNTE and is likely to attempt to influence the education system again. López Obrador has been a harsh critic of the reforms, saying he will derogate it. He has promised a 'National Agreement for Education with Equality and Quality.' We will see if, this time, Mexican authorities will learn from the past and make use of evidence-based policies as well as measures to increase transparency and curb corruption. If they do, they may finally deliver a quality, inclusive education system with equal opportunities for students in Mexico."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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