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## FEATURED Q&A

# How Can Education Partnerships Persist After the Pandemic?



Civil society groups in Latin America have collaborated closely with public schools during the pandemic, though many partnerships are seen as temporary. // File Photo: Mexican Government.

**Q** During the Covid-19 pandemic, 84 percent of the 16 Latin American and Caribbean civil society organizations in a recent survey by the Inter-American Dialogue have directly collaborated with public schools. Also, 70 percent have coordinated efforts with education ministries or other national-level education agencies. However, the report adds that many of these partnerships are seen as temporary and lack permanent investments. What are the most important ways that civil society organizations have partnered with schools and governments in the region during the pandemic in order to support education? What will be needed in order to maintain, or even scale, these partnerships after the pandemic ends? What opportunities exist in the region for businesses and other private organizations to buttress education, and how conducive are existing frameworks for such coordination efforts?

**A** Jorge Ibáñez Carvallo, deputy director of educational policy at Educación 2020 in Chile: "In Chile, we have had working groups that bring together actors from the field of education, including civil society organizations. For example, the country's Education Ministry called on Educación 2020 to participate in two working groups, one to propose measures to prevent educational exclusion and another to discuss the return to in-person classes. The foundation has also made information available to education officials to contribute to decision-making and the targeting of actions in the current scenario. Examples of this are the results of two surveys of educational actors on distance learning. After the pandemic ends, permanent articula-

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Brazil Surpasses 450,000 Deaths From Covid-19

Brazil's death toll from Covid-19 surpassed 450,000 on Tuesday. Vaccine rollout has been slow in the South American nation.

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### ECONOMIC

## Costa Rica Becomes Newest Member of OECD

Costa Rica became the 38th member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. It is the first country in Central America to join the OECD and the fourth in Latin America.

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### POLITICAL

## Police Chief of Mexico's Sinaloa State Killed in Ambush

Joel Ernesto Soto, the police chief of Mexico's Sinaloa state, was ambushed as he drove to Culiacán, the state capital. He had survived an earlier assassination attempt three weeks ago.

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Soto // File Photo: Mexican Government.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Brazil Surpasses 450,000 Deaths From Covid-19

Brazil on Tuesday surpassed 450,000 deaths from Covid-19 amid a slow rollout of vaccines against the disease and as epidemiologists warned about a potential new surge of infections, Agence France-Presse reported. The country's health ministry said Tuesday that it had recorded 2,173 new deaths in the previous 24-hour period, bringing the country's total number of deaths since the pandemic began last year to 452,031, AFP reported. Brazil has the world's second-highest death toll from Covid-19 after the United States, which has recorded more than 590,000 deaths. By comparison, Brazil has just under two-thirds of the population of the United States but more than three-quarters the number of deaths in the United States. Brazil's daily number of deaths surged to more than 3,000 in mid-April, but its daily death toll has decreased to 1,854 on average over the past week, AFP reported. However, Brazil's number of infections has been steadily rising since early May, averaging about 66,000 over the past week. The country's rollout of Covid-19 vaccines has been slow, with just 20 percent of the population receiving a first dose and 9.9 percent receiving a second dose. Brazil also recorded its first cases last week of a novel coronavirus variant first identified in India in six members of a crew of a Hong Kong-flagged ship.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Costa Rica Becomes Fourth Nation in Region to Join OECD

Costa Rica on Tuesday officially became the 38th member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, United Press

International reported. The Central American nation was inducted into the OECD following completion of several domestic procedures for the ratification of the OECD Convention, a process that began in April 2015, the organization said. "We are delighted to welcome Costa Rica into the OECD family at a time when multilateralism is more important than ever," OECD Secretary General Ángel Gurría said in a statement, UPI reported. "This reflects the importance of working together for designing and implementing better policies, and Costa Rica will no doubt represent a new beacon for the OECD in the region," Gurría added. Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado made the announcement on Twitter, saying the partnership would strengthen "high-standard public policy for the benefit of all [of Costa Rica]" and acknowledging the role played by the governments of his predecessors, Luis Guillermo Solís and Laura Chinchilla, as well as the private sector and civil society. "Membership to the OECD gives Costa Rica a valuable opportunity to face the economic and social challenges brought by the pandemic with like-minded partners who are at the epicenter of the most meaningful discussions surrounding this subject," Dyalá Jiménez, then-trade minister of Costa Rica, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published May 27, 2020. Costa Rica is the fourth Latin American nation to be part of the OECD, after Mexico, Chile and Colombia.

## U.S. Officials Downgrade Mexico's Air Safety Rating

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration on Tuesday downgraded its air safety rating for Mexico, demoting it to a Category 2 air safety ranking, a move that will prevent Mexican airlines operating to and from the United States from adding new flights to U.S. cities, The Wall Street Journal reported. The FAA said that it took the action because its counterpart in Mexico, the Agencia Federal de Aviación Civil, fell short of international standards. The FAA cited concerns including political independence, training and compensation at the

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Police Chief of Mexico's Sinaloa State Killed in Ambush

The chief of police for Mexico's northwestern Sinaloa state, Joel Ernesto Soto, was killed while driving to Culiacán, the state's capital, BBC News reported Tuesday. Local authorities said gunmen fired some two hundred bullets at his car. Soto had survived an earlier attempt to kill him three weeks ago. It is unclear who may have been behind the attack. Gang violence is prevalent in Sinaloa, where the Sinaloa drug cartel is known as the most violent group, according to the report.

## Brazilian Political Leaders Rule Out Sweeping Tax Overhaul

Political leaders in Brazil have agreed to rework the country's tax system through partial and gradual changes rather than a sweeping overhaul, the Financial Times reported Tuesday. "The ideal tax reform is the one that Congress can approve at this time," Arthur Lira, the speaker of the lower house, said on Tuesday. Lira, Economy Minister Paulo Guedes and Rodrigo Pacheco, the president of the Senate, on Monday reached a deal to pass a series of piecemeal changes to modify the fiscal regime.

## Venezuela Seeks Opposition Leader López's Extradition From Spain

Venezuela's government has formally requested that Spain extradite prominent opposition leader Leopoldo López to complete the remaining eight years of a 14 year prison term, the Associated Press reported Tuesday. López fled Venezuela to Spain last year. It was unclear whether Spain's government or its National Court, which handles extradition matters, would allow an extradition process to begin. López said he is at the disposal of Spanish courts and would appear if called.

Mexican agency, the newspaper reported. The U.S. agency added that it would help aviation authorities to improve safety oversight. In announcing the action, the FAA said it “fully committed to helping the Mexican aviation authority improve its safety oversight system to a level that meets” international standards, Reuters reported. The FAA added that it is “ready to provide expertise and resources” to resolve issues raised in its safety assessment. The FAA began its audit last October and found 28 issues with Mexico’s air safety oversight, according to a senior official of Mexico’s Transport and Communications Ministry, The Wall Street Journal reported. In addition to barring Mexican airlines from adding new flights to cities in the United States, the FAA’s action limits airlines’ ability to form marketing agreements with each other, Reuters reported. On Tuesday, Mexico’s government said it is determined to quickly recover the Category 1 air safety rating, Reuters reported. “I think it will be a relatively quick and easy process,” Deputy Transportation Minister Carlos Morán told the wire service. “I hope it is less than three months.”

## BUSINESS NEWS

### Union Calls for Strike at Chile’s Escondida, Spence Mines

A union representing workers at BHP Group’s Escondida and Spence copper mines in Chile has rejected the company’s contract offer and called on employees to launch a strike beginning Thursday morning, Reuters reported. The union’s secretary, Roberto Robles, said representatives would only return to the negotiating table to notify BHP of their decision to hold a strike. The company told Reuters earlier on Tuesday that it would seek to exhaust all opportunities for dialogue. Escondida is the world’s largest copper mine. It is unclear what the impact of a strike would be for BHP’s operations in Chile, as the negotiation between the remote operations union and the company is the first of its kind, Reuters reported.

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tion spaces can be installed to help improve the quality of education. The experience and visions of organizations in the area of education are valuable to seek solutions to various problems and generate proposals. Public policies must promote innovation with greater force to address learning in the context of the pandemic and the challenges of an education system that has not adjusted to the needs of the 21st century. This would involve partnerships between organizations and actors and the participation of schools to strengthen the capacity for innovation. In Chile’s legal framework, the donations law facilitates companies’ support of civil society organizations that provide direct benefits to the population in situations of vulnerability or scarce resources. It also encourages the delivery of resources through tax benefits granted to companies. Companies have a great interest in supporting projects that affect their areas of interest and where they have a presence in order to promote visible and measurable change.”

**A Salvador Paiz, president of FUNSEPA and board member of FUNDESA in Guatemala City:**

“The state of education in Guatemala was already disgraceful. In addition, we were ill equipped to abruptly transition to virtual learning (21 percent of the population has access to computers, with 17 percent having connectivity at home). Despite enormous efforts by Guatemala’s Ministry of Education (Mineduc), Covid will likely result in the loss of learning for a significant portion of students and, in far too many cases, permanent school abandonment. The pandemic did spark change and innovation. The Mineduc created a ‘cluster’ of NGOs and willing supporters. Through Mineduc, the cluster and entities such as Funsepa, a series of impactful initiatives were undertaken. For example: 1.) The creation of content for the ‘Aprendo en Casa’ initiative; 2.) scholarships awarded to ‘Coursera for Guatemala’

for 37,000 learners; 3.) the launch of an automated WhatsApp chatbot called ‘S.O.S Docente’ (‘Teacher S.O.S.’), which sends assistance and content to teachers; and 4.) preparing schools with masks, disinfectants

“**The real opportunity lies in keeping alive the spirit of collaboration that carried us through the pandemic.**”

– Salvador Paiz

and protocols for a safe return to in-person classes. The real opportunity lies in keeping alive the spirit of collaboration that carried us through the pandemic. Can we continue to work through the cluster and toward the requisite systemic changes that became even more evident during the crisis? Can we promote innovative and technological solutions to raise existing teacher competencies? Can we leverage online and remote-learning tools and also evaluate learning and act before we lose an entire generation of students?”

**A Tomás Gregorini, executive director of Voy Con Vos in Argentina:** “Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have connected with the rural schools with which we were already working in order to jointly articulate actions that will facilitate children’s access to education. In this sense, we were able to identify, together with teachers and school directors, the boys and girls who were in a more complex situation in terms of learning. We went from home to home, respecting all the established health protocols, to reinforce learning in literacy, in particular. Regarding the relationship with the government, we established a link with Argentina’s Ministry of Social Development in order to monitor and

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ensure the delivery of food to rural families of the children and adolescents whom we accompany in their studies. We also started conversations with the Ministry of Education in Chaco province in order to be able to articulate actions to improve the infrastructure of rural schools in order to put them in better condition for the return to classes. Beyond these specific actions due to the pandemic, it is essential that governments create formal spaces for articulation between the state and social organizations in order to promote, facilitate and catalyze actions. It is extremely important for the state to take advantage of organizations' abilities in order to make policies more effective. In addition to having political will, it is important to dedicate the resources and establish the legal frameworks in order to make it possible."

**A** **Debra Gittler, founder of ConTextos in El Salvador:** "At ConTextos, Covid has allowed us to support teachers as the nucleus of communities. Schools are not just physical entities, but rather the binder that unites across generations, families, values, interest groups and geographies. School is transformed from a physical locus of instruction into a concept that utilizes technology and physical resources, and above all, fosters communities built on trust. We invest in teacher/school leadership to support students' entire well-being. That goes beyond just academic attainment to embrace social-emotional learning, child-focused pedagogies, community engagement and empowerment, and interdisciplinary learning. Utilizing hybrid models of technology with in-person workshops, we bring teachers together to professionalize learning and differentiate instruction for kids. However, committed multiyear support from foundations and the private sector is needed. It's

time for the private sector, international aid groups and foundations to invest in and nurture midsize, local organizations that are entrenched in communities and have trust and relationships, while also curating innovation in methodology, not just technology. Organizations such as ConTextos need more opportunities for multiyear funding that

“**Schools are not just physical entities, but rather the binder that unites across generations, families, values, interest groups and geographies.**”

— Debra Gittler

allows for agility in meeting school and community needs—especially during these times of uncertainty. But let's be frank: working in Central America always means uncertainty. The multimillion dollar three-to-five-year grant cycles must find ways to disseminate funding over longer periods in the range of \$100,000-\$500,000 per year; and the private sector needs to be willing to invest based on the well-being of communities, not just corporate social responsibility that buttresses the immediate bottom line. And finally, we must reconsider scale and replication from a top-down model to a bottom-up process that fosters many different initiatives via alliance building and coalitions. During Covid, when we were all stuck at home, it became abundantly clear who stayed local. Let's invest in them, and not invite back the bilateral aid bandits."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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