

## Chapter 3. The provision of school education in Colombia

*This chapter looks at i) the organisation of the school network, including private school provision; ii) school governance, leadership and community participation; and iii) the organisation of teaching and learning in Colombia. This includes flexible school models, ethnic and special needs education, learning standards, instruction time, educational materials and evaluation. Transitions between school education and other levels and programmes, such as early childhood education provided by the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare and vocational training provided by the National Learning Service are also considered. The chapter analyses strengths and challenges with a particular focus on access to a good education in rural areas. Finally, recommendations are presented, highlighting the need to improve school clusters, transport and boarding while strengthening school leadership and collaboration between schools.*

The statistical data for Israel are supplied by and under the responsibility of the relevant Israeli authorities. The use of such data by the OECD is without prejudice to the status of the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and Israeli settlements in the West Bank under the terms of international law.

## Context and features

### *School network*

Compulsory education in Colombia lasts 12 years. Students enter the education system with a year of pre-school (Year 0 or transition year, age 5) and have five years of primary (*básica primaria*, Years 1-5) and four years of lower secondary education (*básica secundaria*, Years 6-9). Students then progress to two years of upper secondary education (*media*, Years 10-11), following a general (*académico*) or vocational (*técnico*) track. The general track strengthens students' abilities in a specific area of their preference, preparing them for tertiary education. The vocational track prepares students to enter the labour market upon graduation. Compulsory upper secondary education is a recent development – only primary and lower secondary education, referred to in Colombia as basic education, used to be compulsory. However, compulsory upper secondary education is currently being introduced gradually until 2025 in urban and 2030 in rural areas.

Recent policies have led to a significant expansion of participation in education in Colombia. Enrolment rates have increased in both lower and upper secondary education over the last fifteen years, and Colombia has also progressed in widening access to early childhood and tertiary education. Since 2012, public education has been free of charge from the transition year to the end of upper secondary education, although indirect costs such as learning materials and transport remain. Additionally, other policies and programmes such as conditional cash transfers, scholarships for tertiary study, flexible school models, ethnic education, boarding schools and school meals have all contributed to reaching vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable way to go towards increasing coverage, keeping students in school and smoothing their transitions. Gaps in enrolment also persist between urban and rural areas, and disadvantaged and advantaged students, particularly in pre-primary and upper secondary education. For details about the organisation of the school system and trends in quality, equity and efficiency of education, see Chapter 1.

Education is provided by public and private schools. Public education is provided directly through schools managed by the Secretaries of Education of the department, district or certified municipality. In Colombia, decentralisation in education towards the regional and local levels has been managed by a process of certification as explained in Chapter 1. The Secretaries of Education of the departments and certified municipalities are responsible for planning the school network and for opening and closing schools within their territory. Technical regulations for the ratio of students to teachers defined by the Ministry of National Education (*Ministerio de Educación Nacional*, MEN, hereafter ministry/ministry of education), which consider factors such as the dispersion of students or the size of classrooms, provide indications for the opening of a school or school site.

Where there is limited capacity in terms of staff or infrastructure or some other limitation, Secretaries of Education can provide education through various forms of partnerships with private providers (*matrícula oficial contratada*) regulated by Decree 1851 of 2015. These largely include i) schools that are privately operated with autonomy over the use of resources, but publicly funded, that is government-dependent private schools; and ii) school vouchers for a limited number of low-income students to attend independent private schools (see Annex 3.A). The cost for contracting private providers covered with resources provided through Colombia's fiscal transfer mechanism, the General System of Transfers (*Sistema General de Participaciones*, SGP), must not exceed the per-student funding allocation defined by the central government. Independent private schools

(*matrícula no oficial*) are owned by natural or legal persons (churches, co-operatives, associations, foundations, or for-profit entities) and can charge tuition and other fees according to regulations established by the ministry as well as a performance ranking established on an annual basis. These schools generally receive no public funding (for full details on the regulations of independent private schools, see Sánchez (2018<sub>[1]</sub>)).<sup>1</sup>

Parents and students are free to select the public or private school of their choice. If parents choose a public school, Secretaries of Education assign students based on national regulations that specify the order of assignment depending on student characteristics (Resolution 7797 of 2015).<sup>2</sup> Of the more than 9.3 million students in the Colombian school system in 2017, 81.3% were in the public system, with 6.6% of these students being served by a school hired by the Secretary of Education under the different mechanisms, that is government-dependent private provision. The remaining 18.7% were enrolled in independent private schools.<sup>3</sup> Based on data from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015, enrolment in independent private schools is much higher than in many other countries (19% of 15-year-olds compared to 4% on average across the OECD) (OECD, 2016<sub>[2]</sub>). As in other countries, students in rural areas in Colombia have less school choice than their urban peers (Echazarra and Radinger, forthcoming<sub>[3]</sub>). In 2017, only 4.2% of rural students attended an independent private school compared with 23.4% of urban students (calculations based on Sánchez (2018<sub>[1]</sub>)).

All schools must fulfil three requirements to be authorised to operate: i) to have an operating license (for private schools) or be officially recognised (for public schools); ii) to have the necessary administrative structure, physical infrastructure, and educational resources to provide education, also referred to as the educational basket (*canasta educativa*); and iii) to have a school educational project (*Proyecto Educativo Institucional*, PEI) (MEN, 2009<sub>[4]</sub>). Public and private schools (both government-dependent/contracted and independent private) work under the direct supervision of the Secretaries of Education, who have the main responsibility of assuring educational quality and coverage in their territories, in accordance with national laws and the regulations and normative framework provided by the ministry (Sánchez, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>).

Schools, and especially public schools, in Colombia are organised as school clusters with a number of sites or *sedes* in Spanish. The main site, also referred to as educational institution (*institución educativa*), offers all levels of compulsory education. The remaining sites, classified as educational centres (*centros educativos*), offer only some levels of education. A school cluster includes one educational institution and a number of educational centres. This organisation of schools goes back to the provisions set out in the General Education Law of 1994<sup>4</sup> but has been promoted in the case of public schools in particular since 2002 within the framework of Law 715 of 2001 and Decree 3012 of 2002 (Econometría Consultores, 2013<sub>[5]</sub>).

According to official records, at the end of 2002, 48% of schools only offered primary education, another 35% pre-school and primary education, and only 5% all levels from pre-school to upper secondary education (MEN, 2008<sub>[6]</sub>). The ministry therefore promoted the clustering of nearby schools in order to ensure all students have the opportunity to complete their education within a single school cluster, to promote smoother transitions between levels and reduce student dropout.

Looking at the organisation of the school network in 2017 compared to 2004, that is at the beginning of the increased drive to cluster public schools under one leadership, illustrates the change the public school network has undergone. In 2004, there were still 20 924 public school clusters with a total of 44 471 individual sites (Econometría

Consultores, 2013<sup>[5]</sup>). In 2017, these had been reorganised into 9 881 clusters with 44 033 sites. Most of the sites today are located in a rural area, where the number of sites is higher than in urban areas even though the number of students is lower (see Table 3.1).

The number of sites in a public school cluster varies significantly across schools and parts of the country. Especially in remote rural areas, school clusters are often comprised by a large number of smaller sites while clusters in urban areas typically unite two or three larger sites under a single administration.<sup>5</sup> Private schools usually have only one site and can, therefore, be rather considered single-site schools. This also explains why 9 768 or half of all schools are private, while private enrolment (independent) only makes up 18.7% of total enrolment in pre-primary to upper secondary education. Public schools are also larger than private ones. In 2015, the average public school cluster had 783 students, the average private school 152 students in a single site (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

**Table 3.1. The organisation of the school network in Colombia**

	Number of school clusters (2017)	Number of school sites (2017)	Average student enrolment per site (2015)
<b>Public</b>	<b>9 881</b>	<b>44 033</b>	
Urban	3 850	8 704	696
Rural	6 031	35 329	68
<b>Private</b>	<b>9 768</b>	<b>9 773</b>	
Urban	9 301	9 306	187
Rural	467	467	182
<b>Total</b>	<b>19 649</b>	<b>53 806</b>	
Urban	13 151	18 010	435
Rural	6 498	35 796	70

*Notes:* Public school clusters are categorised as urban if all sites are located in an urban area or if the main site is located in an urban area. Urban public school clusters therefore include school clusters with a mix of urban and rural sites. In 2017, 1 110 urban public school clusters administered both urban and rural sites. Public school clusters are categorised as rural if all sites are located in a rural area, including the main site. The number of school sites includes both main sites (*instituciones educativas*) and attached sites (*centros educativos*). Average enrolments per school site are based on enrolments in compulsory education, from the transition year to upper secondary education.

*Source:* Authors' elaboration, data from Sánchez, J. (2018), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools: Country Background Report for Colombia*, <http://www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm>, based on SIMAT (integrated enrolment system) and DUE (Single Directory of Educational Establishments).

## ***School governance***

### ***School autonomy***

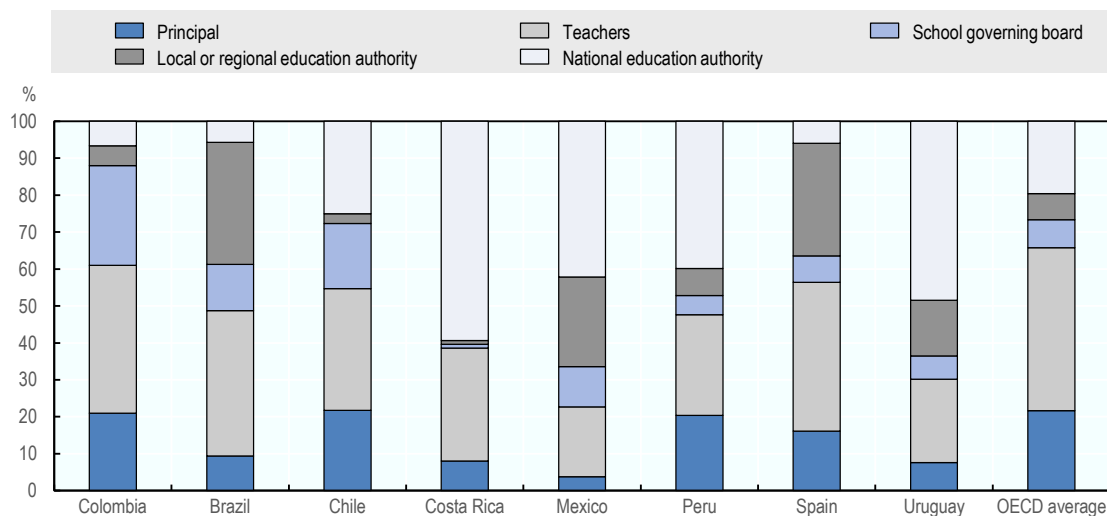
Colombia has not been indifferent to a general trend towards devolving responsibilities for education (OECD, 2017<sup>[7]</sup>). Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, the operation of education has been progressively devolved to the regional and local levels. As has already been mentioned, decentralisation in education has been implemented by a process of certification of departments, districts and municipalities as certified territorial entities (*entidades territoriales certificadas*, ETC), based on the fulfilment of certain requirements. Education in municipalities that are not certified is provided by the respective department and its Secretary of Education. Chapters 1 and 2 provide further details on governance and funding. The General Education Law (Art. 77) gave schools

substantial autonomy to define their own curriculum and study plan – one of the most distinctive characteristics of school education in Colombia. Schools also have some budgetary autonomy as explained in Chapter 2, but little influence on the selection or dismissal of their teachers as analysed in Chapter 4.

Data from the OECD PISA 2015 based on school principals' reports illustrate the degree of autonomy for schools in Colombia (see Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2). Looking at responsibilities for pedagogical and curricular decisions, school principals, the school board (in Colombia the directive council as explained below) and teachers make most of the curricular choices. Education authorities have fewer responsibilities over the curriculum than in most countries participating in PISA 2015, whether this means choosing textbooks, determining course content or deciding which courses are offered.

**Figure 3.1. Distribution of responsibilities for the curriculum, PISA 2015**

Results based on school principals' reports

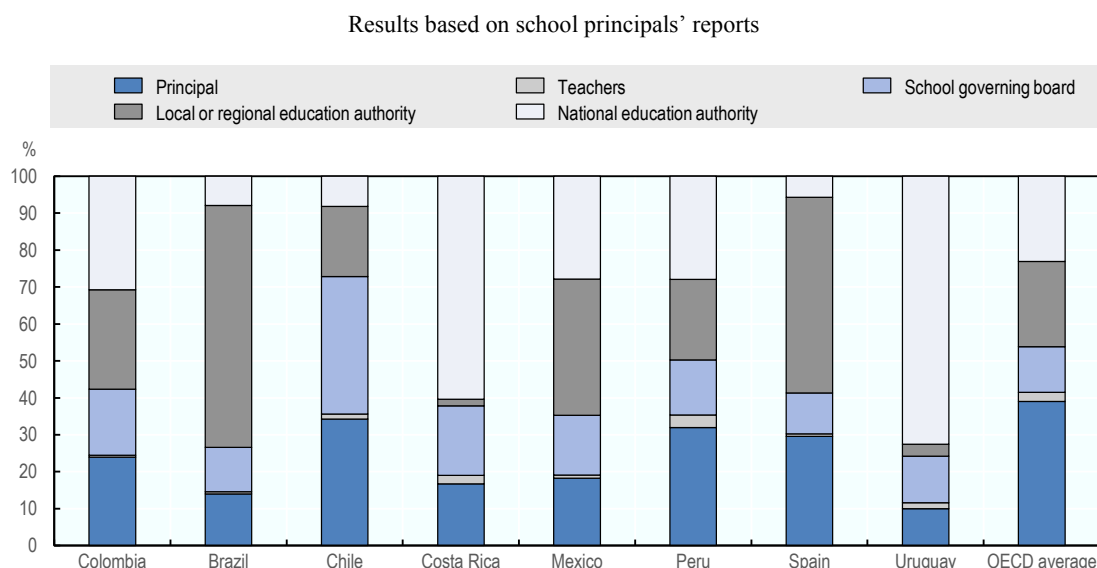


*Notes:* The three tasks categorised as responsibilities for curriculum include choosing textbooks, deciding which courses are offered and determining course content. The figure is based on the assumption that the responsibilities of the five actors combined amount to 100%.

School governing boards differ widely across countries in their composition and function. In the case of Colombia, the school governing board refers to the directive council.

*Source:* OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>, Table II.4.2.

For instance, in Colombia, approximately 12% of the responsibilities over the curriculum are held by education authorities, compared to 27% on average across OECD countries, and 28% in Chile, 39% in Brazil, 47% in Peru, 66% in Mexico and 64% in Uruguay. Teachers hold 40% of responsibilities for the school curriculum and the school board 27%. The share of decision-making power for the school board is, in fact, the second highest among all participating countries. Teachers are also involved in setting student disciplinary policies within their school through their school board which makes 90% of decisions in this respect (OECD, 2016<sub>[2]</sub>).

**Figure 3.2. Distribution of responsibilities for resource management, PISA 2015**

*Notes:* The six tasks categorised as responsibilities for resources include selecting teachers for hire, firing teachers, establishing teachers' starting salaries, determining teachers' salary increases, formulating the school budget and deciding on budget allocations within the school. The figure is based on the assumption that the responsibilities of the five actors combined amount to 100%.

School governing boards differ widely across countries in their composition and function. In the case of Colombia, the school governing board refers to the directive council.

*Source:* OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>, Table II.4.2.

Individual schools are therefore responsible for the elaboration and implementation of their school educational project (*Proyecto Educativo Institucional*, PEI) within the normative framework established by the ministry and the certified territorial entities. According to the General Education Law, the school educational project must be responsive to the needs of the local community in general and students in particular, and be concrete, feasible and suitable for evaluation. Among other aspects, it establishes the school goals and objectives, the human and material resources required to achieve those goals, the pedagogical strategy and study plan, the school community handbook (*manual de convivencia*) and the school's governing bodies and their responsibilities.

The project must be elaborated with the participation of the entire educational community with the support of the territorial entity's Secretary of Education, which will also provide technical-pedagogical support throughout the school year for the implementation of the educational project. The project is registered with the Secretary of Education and should be periodically updated. Schools have five weeks of institutional development throughout the school year, led by the school principal, to work on their PEI, the study plan, pedagogical developments, self-evaluation, and partnerships with other institutions.

### *School leadership*

School principals (*directores*) are responsible for the leadership, administration, supervision and co-ordination of education provision in schools. According to the ministry's Manual of Functions, Requirements and Competencies for School Leaders and Teachers, school principals must fulfil essential functions in four areas: directive;

academic; administrative and financial; and community relations. Accordingly, school principals should lead the elaboration and implementation of the school educational project; chair the directive and the academic councils; co-ordinate with the other school governing bodies; administer the school's human and financial resources; provide support to teachers; and formulate and execute annual quality improvement plans (MEN, 2016<sup>[8]</sup>). The school principal is responsible for all the sites in the cluster. A principal in a main site located in an urban area can thus be responsible for school sites located in rural areas. School principals must be present at the school during the eight hours of the school day, unlike teachers who have a minimum of six hours of work at the school premises.

As highlighted above, schools and school principals have little autonomy to make employment decisions about their staff and less so than in many other countries, even though school principals may informally inform employment decisions through contacts with their Secretary of Education. Since the adoption of a new employment framework for teachers (and school leaders) in 2002, explained in depth in Chapter 4, school principals in Colombia have responsibility for evaluating some of their teaching staff to confirm their probationary period and as part of regular performance management.

For the OECD PISA 2015, 24.2% of school principals reported to have considerable responsibility for hiring, and 22.0% for firing teachers, compared to an OECD average of 70.3% and 57.4% respectively. Within the Latin American context, school principals in Colombia are more likely to report such responsibility than their counterparts in Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay, but less so than in Chile and Peru. Principals in Brazil report similar levels of responsibility for decisions about teaching staff (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>).

The manual of functions for school leadership acknowledges two other leading roles besides the school principal: rural directors (*directores rurales*) and co-ordinators (*coordinadores*). A rural director is appointed when an individual school site within the cluster (that offers only one or more of the levels of compulsory education but not all) has more than 150 students. This director is responsible for the administration of the site and has no academic workload. A co-ordinator is responsible for supporting school management and directing the different initiatives and programmes defined in the school educational project. They also co-ordinate the work of teachers and facilitate and guide the school's educational processes. Co-ordinators are assigned by the Secretary of Education based on the number of students, as shown in the following table. Additionally, if the Secretary has enough resources, another co-ordinator can be appointed for evening school or for schools with more than 5 sites or 6 000 students.

As explained in Chapter 4, there are two main teacher statutes in Colombia, one for teachers and school leaders employed before 2002 (Statute 2277), and one for those employed after 2002 (Statute 1278). Teachers and school leaders in ethnic education are employed under separate regulations (Decree 804 on ethnic education).

The selection of school leaders follows a similar process as the one for teachers. Candidates must have acquired the same minimum qualifications as those required to become a permanent teacher — at least a university degree in education (*licenciatura*) or a relevant knowledge area. In addition, they are required to have relevant experience in teaching and managerial roles: at least six years of experience for school principals, at least four years of experience for rural directors and at least five years for co-ordinators. School leaders employed under the new statute are evaluated on a regular basis by the governor of their department or mayor of their district or certified municipality.



**Table 3.2. Criteria for appointing co-ordinators**

Enrolment of cluster	Co-ordinators
≤ 500	0
501-900	1
901-1 400	2
1 401-2 000	3
2 001-2 700	4
2 701-3 500	5
3 501- 4 400	6
4 401-5 400	7
>5 400	8

Source: Reproduced from Sánchez, J. (2018), *OECD Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource Use in Schools: Country Background Report for Colombia*, <http://www.oecd.org/education/schoolresourcesreview.htm>.

School leaders follow the same career ladder as teachers in their same statute, but their salaries increase depending on their school leadership role and the levels of education offered in their school. Salary increases are higher for school principals than for co-ordinators and rural directors, ranging between 25% and 30% for the former, and 20% and 10% respectively for the latter. Compensation is also higher if the school has more than 1 000 students enrolled or offers more school shifts (an additional monthly bonus of between 20% and 30%). School leaders working in remote areas receive a monthly bonus of 15% over their monthly salary. Principals and rural directors can receive one extra monthly salary each year if they fulfil the criteria of an education management indicator of the ministry, which includes the school performance index (ISCE) explained below.

In 2017, there were 20 855 school leaders (principals, rural directors, co-ordinators and others) in Colombia,<sup>6</sup> with the majority working in urban areas (65%); 5% of school leaders were not assigned to any position which is related to the organisation of schools into school clusters, but also school leaders taking leave of absence to study or assume a position in the teacher union. School leaders are generally older than teachers and more likely to be male. About 4 in 10 school leaders (39%) are between 55 and 64 years old, and more than half (56%) of school leaders are men. School leaders hold high levels of qualifications: 68% held a postgraduate degree in 2017, half of which in education (51% of these school leaders) (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

### *Community participation*

Legislation in Colombia establishes democratic school governance arrangements and encourages community engagement in school. The entire school community is expected to participate in the development of the educational project and the management of the school through different bodies.

The responsibility for the administration of the school lies mainly with the school principal and the directive council (*consejo directivo*). The directive council in public schools is composed of the school principal, acting as head of the council, two teachers' representatives, two parents' representatives, a students' representative, an alumni representative and a representative of the productive sector. Some of the council's responsibilities are: planning and evaluating the educational project; taking all decisions that affect school management; solving conflicts between teachers, management and students; defining the school community handbook (*manual de convivencia*); taking part



in the assessment of teachers; and defining the procedures for the use of the school's infrastructure, among others.

Additionally, schools have an academic council (*consejo académico*) – also headed by the school principal and made up of co-ordinators and teacher representatives – mainly responsible for the organisation, pedagogical orientation, implementation and continuous improvement of the school curriculum and study plan. A school coexistence committee (*comité de convivencia*) made up of representatives of the entire school community provides advice in matters of school climate and discipline to the directive council.

Besides involving parents in the directive council and coexistence committee, schools should establish specific bodies for parental participation: a general assembly of parents (*asamblea general de padres de familia*), responsible for enforcing parents' rights and duties regarding their children's education; a parents' council (*consejo de padres de familia*), involved in the elaboration of school improvement plans; and a parents' association (*asociación de padres de familia*), responsible for supporting the implementation of the educational project of the school.

Students also participate in school management. Aside from having a representative in the school directive council and the school coexistence committee, students elect an ombudsman (*personero*) and a student council (*consejo estudiantil*). The ombudsman is a student from Year 11, elected to promote students' rights and obligations. The student council is the highest collegiate group for student democratic participation. It is composed of a representative from each of the years of the school, except for pre-school and Years 1-3 which are represented by one student. The student council then elects one representative to participate in the directive council to represent all students, but without decision-making power (*sin voto*) (MEN, 2008<sub>[6]</sub>).

### ***The organisation of teaching and learning***

#### ***Learning standards and guidelines***

Although schools have substantial pedagogical and curricular autonomy, the ministry has developed a series of standards and guidelines that schools must take into account when designing their own curricula, and that should guide teachers in their work in classrooms (see Table 3.3). All of these standards and guidelines were valid at the time of writing.

The curriculum guidelines (*lineamientos curriculares*) were established in 1998 to support schools in the design and development of their own curriculum according to their educational project (MEN, 1998<sub>[9]</sub>). At the beginning of the new century, the ministry issued basic competency standards (*estándares básicos de competencia*, EBC) (MEN, 2006<sub>[10]</sub>; MEN, 2006<sub>[11]</sub>). These standards establish what students must know and know how to do and provide criteria to assess the level of development of students' competency. They are not only a guide for the design of a school's curriculum, but also a reference for the development and selection of textbooks and other classroom materials, and the design of the school's evaluation system. Standards are established by cycle rather than by individual year,<sup>7</sup> and they are progressive to indicate an increasing level of complexity of students' competency. To provide guidance on teaching practice, the ministry has complemented these documents with pedagogical guidelines for different subjects and competencies (MEN, 2013<sub>[12]</sub>).

As part of a national strategy named *Día E* (later explained in this chapter), the ministry issued Basic Learning Rights (*Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje*, DBA) to further define

the learning framework for each level and subject area (MEN, 2016<sub>[13]</sub>). These guidelines have been revised following feedback and consultation with teachers and other stakeholders. Unlike the previous curricular documents, basic learning rights are not only meant to inform schools and teachers, but also parents about the competencies that children should acquire in each year (OECD, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>). To help teachers with the implementation of the DBA, the ministry published a new set of pedagogical and didactic tools in 2017 (*Mallas de Aprendizaje*). These tools establish the relationship between the basic learning rights and the previous, still valid curricular documents, providing teachers with guidelines and suggestions on how to support students in their learning (MEN, 2017<sub>[15]</sub>). Also, in 2017, a new curricular tool (*bases curriculares*) was issued for early childhood education and pre-school to clarify previous guidelines and support educators.

**Table 3.3. Learning standards and guidelines**

	Subject or competency areas	Educational levels and years
Curriculum Guidelines (1998)	Core and compulsory subject areas defined by the General Education Law	Pre-school to upper secondary education
Basic Competency Standards	Language, mathematics, science, citizenship (2004) and English (2006)	Primary to upper secondary education
Pedagogical Guidelines (2008-10)	Philosophy, physical education, artistic education, technology	Primary to upper secondary education
Basic Learning Rights (2015-16)	Language, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, English	Transition year (Year 0), primary to upper secondary education
<i>Mallas de Aprendizaje</i> (2017)	Language, mathematics, natural sciences	Primary education
Curriculum Foundations (2017)	Early childhood development	Pre-school education

### *Instruction time*

The school calendar is defined each year by each Secretary of Education and with prior approval of the ministry. The school year lasts 40 weeks and is split into 2 semesters with 12 weeks of holidays. There are two calendar options for the start and end of the school year. Calendar A emulates the calendar year with the school year starting in January and finishes in December. Calendar B starts around mid-year and ends at the same time in the following year. All public schools follow Calendar A, while some private schools follow Calendar B. Calendars are flexible to adapt to the regional context and local traditions. For instance, in rural contexts or areas with ethnic education programmes, the school calendar is usually adjusted to the agricultural calendar (Sánchez, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>).<sup>8</sup>

The number of hours of compulsory instruction per school week and year is established for each level: 20 hours per week or 800 hours per year during pre-school and the transition year, 25 hours per week or 1 000 hours per year during primary education, and 30 hours per week or 1 200 hours per year for lower and upper secondary education. At least 80% of this time must be used for teaching the mandatory and fundamental subject areas set out in the General Education Law of 1994, which should be reflected in the school's study plan and educational project (Sánchez, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>).<sup>9</sup>

Compared to OECD countries, Colombia has a very high number of average hours of annual compulsory instruction as well as total hours of compulsory instruction during primary and secondary education. Colombian students have 2 262 hours more total compulsory instruction time during their primary and lower secondary education than the average student in the OECD (9 800 vs. 7 538). Total compulsory instruction time from

primary to upper secondary education in Colombia is almost as high as in Chile, the country with most instruction time among countries with available data (12 200 hours vs. 13 091 hours) even though Chilean students have one year more of schooling. The relatively large number of instruction hours is also related to a relatively long school year. Colombian students attend at least 15 days more of school per year than the OECD average (OECD, 2017<sup>[16]</sup>). The time per week 15-year-olds reported to spend in regular lessons in Colombia according to the OECD PISA 2015 is around the OECD average (27 hours a week) (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>).

The number of school hours per day is one of the most debated topics in education in Colombia (Sanchez, 2018). The General Education Law of 1994 established full-day schooling for all schools instead of the morning and afternoon shifts that had been in place to expand enrolments. The full school day, however, was never fully implemented in schools. The National Development Plan (*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*, PND) for 2014-18 established a policy for the implementation of full-day schooling, regulated subsequently through Decree 501 in 2016. By 2030, all schools must offer a full school day. The length of academic hours in full-day schooling varies according to the level of education: five hours per day in pre-school, six hours in primary and seven hours in lower and upper secondary education, that is at least one hour more for pedagogical activities per school day than previously. In addition to these pedagogical hours, schools must provide time for other activities, such as recreation and meals.

To be part of the Full-Day Schooling (*Jornada Única*), programme, a school has to comply with four requirements: adequate infrastructure; a meal plan for students that includes lunch; sufficient human resources; and operative public services. The ministry aimed to enrol 20% of students in public schools in full-day schooling by 2018 (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>). In 2017, slightly less than one in five public schools offered a fully school day to more than 730 000 students, or about 10% of enrolments (MEN, 2018<sup>[17]</sup>). The remaining schools still offer multiple shifts. To achieve this goal, the programme has been investing in infrastructure, school meals, educational materials, and technical assistance to Secretaries of Education as analysed in Chapter 2.

Additional learning time may also be provided in the form of complementary or extended school days (*jornada complementaria* and *jornada extendida*). These forms of provision – which are optional – have been put in place to complement the school day and in some cases to provide full-day schooling. The complementary school day is normally used for extracurricular activities, while the extended day extends academic instruction. While the extended school days are set to be replaced by the full school day, complementary days may continue offering extracurricular activities (for further details, see Sánchez (2018<sup>[1]</sup>)).

### *Modalities of educational provision*

One of the most distinctive features of school education in Colombia is the existence of a wide range of education modalities targeting the needs of different students.

#### Flexible school models (*Modelos Educativos Flexibles*, MEF)

Flexible models aim to address different needs, from rural and adult education to peace education (or education for reconciliation) among others, by adapting their curricula and pedagogy to the context in which they are implemented and the students they serve. In 2016, more than 850 000 or 11.2% of students enrolled in public education participated in some form of flexible education, a share that has been largely stable over the last years.

Flexible models are particularly important in rural areas: 95.6% of students in flexible models studied in rural areas (data based on SIMAT provided by the ministry).<sup>10</sup>

A recent count identified 28 models recognised by the ministry (see Sánchez (2018<sub>[11]</sub>) for a detailed list of all available models). Among these, the New School (*Escuela Nueva*) is the single most widespread model, providing basic education (primary and lower secondary education) to rural populations following a multi-grade teaching methodology. Other models which are currently being implemented by the ministry include:

- Accelerated Learning (*Aceleración del Aprendizaje*), primary education for overage children who need to rapidly complete this level to transition to secondary level.
- Walking in Secondary Education (*Caminar en Secundaria*), an accelerated learning model to help overage students in a rural context enter secondary education.
- Post-primary (*Postprimaria*), lower secondary education for rural students provided by primary school teachers responsible for teaching all subjects with limited additional support.
- Rural Upper Secondary (*Media Rural*), to support rural students in finishing their formal education.

#### Ethnic education (*etnoeducación*)

Since the late 1970s, Colombia has developed a specific policy for its ethnic minorities (Afro-Colombian, which includes Raizal and Palenquero; indigenous; and Rrom communities) with the purpose of respecting and maintaining ethnic language, culture and values. In the early 1990s, this policy was formalised in the General Education Law with the creation of ethnic education.

The ministry defines ethnic education as an education that is provided to ethnic groups or communities with their own culture, language, traditions and forms of social and political organisation (MEN, 2009<sub>[41]</sub>). Accordingly, education for these communities must have the two following characteristics: first, education has to be bilingual, based on the mother tongue of the communities; and second, the teachers must be selected in consultation with the ethnic populations (and preferably be members of the community) and receive adequate training. In 2016, about 280 000 students or 3.7% of public enrolment followed an ethnic education programme, up from 2.4% in 2010. As for flexible models, the largest share of these students – 87% – were enrolled in an ethnic programme in a rural school (data based on SIMAT provided by the ministry).

Ethnic education is regulated by Decree 804 of 1995 which grants ethnic minorities full autonomy to organise their own schools and curriculum, in accordance with their needs, interests or expectations. The government only retains an advisory role in curricular development, the elaboration of textbooks and pedagogical materials, and teacher education. This decree also regulates the employment of educators of ethnic minorities (*etnoeducadores*). For details on teacher preparation for ethnic education, see Chapter 4.

There is also a sectorial policy with an intercultural and multilingual emphasis established as a result of the joint effort of the government and the authorities and representative organisations of the country's ethnic minorities. This policy is currently transitioning from ethnic education as a policy of recognition of diversity, identity, respect and

inclusion to the construction of ethnic groups' own intercultural education systems (*Sistemas Educativos Propios e Interculturales*) (MEN, 2014<sub>[18]</sub>).

Among these systems, the Individual Indigenous Educational System (*Sistema Educativo Indígena Propio*, SEIP) developed together with CONTCEPI, the National Work and Concertation Commission on Education for the Indigenous People, is the most developed. It has been a seven-year process that was about to be finalised in 2018. Once this system is implemented, it will operate like a certified territorial entity and will be exclusively responsible for the organisation, administration and technical-pedagogical support of education for indigenous communities. Until functioning in full, a transitional decree allows Secretaries of Education to hire indigenous organisations to provide education for their communities. In 2016, 24 Secretaries of Education hired 59 different organisations to manage 863 schools with 131 776 indigenous students (Sánchez, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>).

Similar own intercultural education systems are being developed for the Afro-Colombian and Rrom populations (MEN, 2014<sub>[18]</sub>). Judging from the experience of the development of the system for indigenous peoples, this process may take several years.

### Special needs education

Finally, the adoption of a policy to promote the inclusion of children with special educational needs, or children with a disability, in mainstream schools is another recent development in the Colombian school system. This policy puts into practice the principle of inclusion already established in the General Education Law of 1994.

In accordance to Decree 1421 of 2017, every school must develop an Individual Plan of Reasonable Adjustments (*Plan Individual de Ajustes Razonables*, PIAR) to make all the necessary curricular, infrastructure and other adjustments to guarantee learning, participation, retention and promotion for all students. Schools must adapt their educational project and the school community handbook (*manual de convivencia*) accordingly to create more inclusive schools. Schools must also report their number of students with any type of disability or special educational need in the Integrated Enrolment System (*Sistema Integrado de Matrícula*, SIMAT), the country's database for the registration of students in public education. For these students, an additional 20% of per-student allocation is transferred to the Secretaries of Education through the country's system for sharing revenues across levels of governance, as explained in Chapter 2.

While quality data are lacking, an increasing share of students is being identified as having a disability: 2.16% of students had a disability in 2017 – an increase of 59% since 2010. About one in five students identified as having special educational needs attended a rural school. The General Education Law and guidelines for the provision of education for vulnerable students also recognises the needs of gifted students. About 80% of gifted students attended an urban school (data based on SIMAT provided by the ministry).

### Educational materials

As explained previously in this chapter, schools in Colombia have considerable autonomy for curricular matters and the selection of textbooks has been the prerogative of each school since there is no national curriculum nor are there national textbooks. Nevertheless, the ministry has distributed textbooks and educational materials to schools in the context of large national programmes.<sup>11</sup> Since the establishment of universal free education in 2012, individual schools should allocate part of the resources from their Educational Services Fund (*Fondo de Servicios Educativos*, FSE) to the purchase of

textbooks and other educational resources. Chapter 2 provides further information on the funding for educational materials and textbooks and schools' services funds.

ICT resources in Colombian schools are mostly provided by the government programme Computers to Educate (*Computadores para Educar*, CPE), implemented by the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communication (MinTIC) together with the ministry of education since 2000. The programme has three main phases: i) access, providing schools with a computer for every 20 enrolled students; ii) teacher education, developing teachers' skills on how to incorporate ICT into their pedagogical work; and iii) maintenance and computer repositioning (Barrera-Osorio, Maldonado and Rodríguez, 2012<sup>[19]</sup>).

In 2016, the programme provided 259 005 terminals across the country, benefiting more than 4 million students and teachers. The programme also trained 47 271 teachers and school leaders, and 154 978 parents, and gave 43 463 tablets to teachers. Colombia's difficult economic situation resulting from a drop in commodity prices has had an important effect on the programme resulting in a decrease of funds in recent years.<sup>12</sup>

The MinTIC also implements the Live Digitally strategy (*Vive Digital*) which provides ICT resources (*Kioskos Vive Digital*) in several communities in the country, mainly in rural areas. By 2017, more than 7 000 *kioskos* had been installed, several of which in schools with exclusive use for academic purposes during school hours (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[11]</sup>).

### *Evaluation and assessment*

Schools in Colombia have a large degree of autonomy over the definition of policies to assess student learning outcomes, including the choice of assessment methods and criteria for student promotion and year repetition (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). The school principal and teachers must establish in the school educational project the criteria for school-level student assessment, which will help them identify students' progress towards the learning objectives and standards stated in the project. According to the ministry, students' assessment in the classroom is expected to be permanent, integral, and flexible; and must help teachers to tailor the learning process to their students' needs. Additionally, the results of students' assessment should be used by each school's evaluation and promotion committee (*comisión de evaluación y promoción*), composed of the school principal, three teachers from each year and a parent representative, to determine student promotion and recommend support activities for students at academic risk (MEN, 2009<sup>[4]</sup>).

In the last three decades, Colombia has developed instruments to measure the performance of schools in terms of learning outcomes. These standardised assessments, called *Pruebas Saber*, are developed under the leadership of the Colombian Institute for Educational Evaluation (*Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación*, ICFES), a public institution connected to the ministry, but with administrative autonomy and an independent budget.<sup>13</sup> Assessments are administered periodically in Years 3, 5 and 9 for a sample of students and assess mathematics and language in all years and science or citizenship in Years 5 and 9. The examination of students in Year 11 carries high stakes for individual students and determines access to tertiary education. It measures students' competencies in language, mathematics, social science and civics, natural science and English. Additional assessments seek to provide incentives for students to perform well, such as *Supérate con el Saber*.<sup>14</sup>

Since 2015, the ministry and the educational evaluation institute ICFES calculate a Synthetic Education Quality Index (*Índice Sintético de Calidad Educativa*, ISCE) –

a multidimensional index of school performance for primary to upper secondary education. The index is calculated individually for each level of education and takes into account four components as described in the following table. It ranges from 1 to 10 and is used to measure the performance of schools and certified territorial entities, but also the system as a whole (for an overview of ISCE results for 2017, see Sánchez (2018<sup>[1]</sup>)). Since the index is a government policy, it depends on future governments if it will be continued.

**Table 3.4. Synthetic Education Quality Index (ISCE)**

Component	Weight (%)	Criterion
Progress	40	Progress in <i>Pruebas Saber</i> in comparison to the previous year
Performance	40	Average score students obtained in mathematics and language assessments
School environment	10	Assessment of the conditions for learning in the classroom
Efficiency	10	Proportion of students who have passed the school year

*Note:* For ISCED 3, “Efficiency” makes up 20%, while the “School environment” is not taken into account.

All actors in the school system have specific improvement goals in terms of their ISCE performance until 2025 when Colombia aims to become the best educated country in Latin America: the Annual Minimum Improvement (*Mejoramiento Mínimo Anual*, MMA) and the Excellence Goal (*Meta de Excelencia*, MDE). Schools exceeding their MMA and meeting the MDE receive a financial bonus. Every year, by decree, all levels of the system organise a day called Education Excellence Day (*Día de la Excelencia Educativa* or *Día E*) dedicated to analysing results and to initiating plans for improvement within the school community. To support schools in their organisation of *Día E*, the ministry and the educational evaluation institute provide guiding materials and organise workshops for some schools. Through the Always E Day strategy (*Siempre Día E*), schools receive additional pedagogical, curricular and assessment materials and reports on their assessments results to help them improve their pedagogical processes.

Colombia does not have a national body responsible for evaluating school processes, but school principals are required to conduct school self-evaluations every year, supported by national guidelines. Based on the results, they must develop a school improvement plan (*Plan de Mejoramiento Institucional*, PMI) (MEN, 2008<sup>[6]</sup>).

## Strengths

### *School network*

*School clusters facilitate access to education in rural and remote areas and have the potential to increase the efficiency of the school network*

In the last two decades, Colombia has made remarkable progress in increasing students’ access to education as explained above and in Chapter 1, and the country is now committed to expanding the coverage of pre-primary and upper secondary education in the years to come. Upper secondary education is envisaged to become universal by 2030. As set out in Colombia’s peace agreement putting an end to the 50-year conflict between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*, FARC-EP), the country is also committed to closing rural-urban gaps in education (see Chapter 1).



Besides access, the ministry is concerned with assuring students' continuation throughout the 12 years of compulsory education (Years 0 to 11). The organisation of public schools into school clusters – promoted in particular since the early 2000s – gives students, especially those in remote rural areas, access to all the years of compulsory education within a single school cluster, potentially promoting smoother transitions between levels and reducing students' dropout rates. Transitions of students between levels of education within a school cluster may, for example, facilitate the sharing of information about students' strengths and weaknesses between a student's old and new teachers.

School clusters may also help balance the advantages and disadvantages of small and large schools, by providing more personalised learning environments for younger children who are most likely to benefit from smaller schools and classes, and by enabling schools to offer their students a broader and more specialised course offer at higher levels thanks to sufficient numbers of students who may be interested in taking such courses. Ensuring a broad curricular offer is often a particular challenge in rural schools given the small number of students and teachers (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[20]</sup>).

A study of the reorganisation of schools on a series of educational indicators provides some evidence about the effects of the promotion of school clusters in Colombia since the beginning of the century (Econometría Consultores, 2013<sup>[5]</sup>). The study found a decrease in dropout rates between 2004 and 2012 in primary and lower secondary education, regardless of the number of sites in the school cluster. The results were mixed however in the case of upper secondary education, where the largest reduction in dropout rates was observed in large school clusters with more than 16 sites.

In relation to repetition rates, the study found a decrease in primary education between 2004 and 2012, particularly in large school clusters with six or more sites, although this reduction is also related to a policy of automatic student promotion between 2002 and 2009. On the other hand, repetition rates in lower and upper secondary education tended to increase between those same years, with the largest increase observed in smaller school clusters with five or less sites. The study furthermore collected qualitative information on perceptions of the school community on the reorganisation of schools which suggest that school clusters had eased rural students' transition between levels and sites.

Since small schools typically face higher costs per students, school networks with a large number of small schools tend to be expensive to operate. Jointly administering multiple schools as part of a cluster can help to enhance the efficiency of school networks and the capacity to provide high-quality instruction by generating economies of scale while maintaining the school network's geographic coverage and avoiding the closure of small rural schools. For example, a school cluster can share equipment and materials, or motivate high-quality teachers to stay in rural areas by providing them with better development opportunities and a larger professional community (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[20]</sup>).

This has been the case also in Colombia where school clusters have been perceived as granting small rural school sites access to school resources and infrastructure such as a library, computer lab and sports facilities (Econometría Consultores, 2013<sup>[5]</sup>). The review team's visit similarly showed that school clusters provide small rural sites with access to ICT resources such as the *kioskos Vive Digital*, even though there are challenges in using these materials effectively for teaching and learning, and in co-ordinating the provision of these services between responsible authorities (e.g. for supplying and connecting ICT materials) (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

*School education follows a comprehensive approach with potential benefits for transitions and equity*

One of the most relevant characteristics of the provision of school education in Colombia is its comprehensive approach until the end of lower secondary school, avoiding early tracking and selection into different pathways (OECD, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>). Early student selection can have a negative impact on students assigned to lower tracks, without raising the performance of the whole student population. Additionally, it risks exacerbating inequities since students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often more likely to be placed in the least academically oriented tracks (OECD, forthcoming<sub>[20]</sub>).

In Colombia, upper secondary education requires students at the age of 15 to choose between a general and a vocational option which can vary and be adjusted to local and regional labour market needs. Students, however, follow most of the same subjects, making the distinction more one of emphasis than independent tracks; 80% of time should be dedicated to the same core areas. Students also gain the right to access tertiary education regardless of their track. According to ministry data, 61.6% of students in upper secondary education were enrolled in a general programme, 38.4% in a vocational programme in 2017.<sup>15</sup> The share of 15-year-olds reporting to be enrolled in a general programme according to the OECD PISA 2015 is around the OECD average (79.2% vs. 81.9%) (OECD, 2016<sub>[2]</sub>). Students in general and vocational programmes in Colombia do not differ generally in their socio-economic status nor in their academic performance (García et al., 2016<sub>[21]</sub>), although vocational education is perceived to have a lower status.

This is different to quite a few other countries as data from the OECD PISA 2015 highlight. On average across OECD countries, 15-year-olds are more likely to be enrolled in a vocational programme if they attend a disadvantaged school. Together with Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Mexico, Colombia is among the 8 out of 72 countries in which students in vocational programmes in fact outperform their peers in general programmes (OECD, 2016<sub>[2]</sub>). Since school sites can offer a general programme, a vocational programme or both types of programmes, both options may be pursued in the same type of institution which has the potential for improving the status of vocational education, even if maintaining a specialised offer (OECD, forthcoming<sub>[20]</sub>). In 2014, nevertheless, only 13% of all school sites offered both programmes. In rural areas, this was only the case for 6% of sites compared to 20% in urban areas (García et al., 2016<sub>[21]</sub>).

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is fundamental for a strong beginning in life and in learning and development (Cunha et al., 2006<sub>[22]</sub>). Both national (Bernal, 2014<sub>[23]</sub>) and international evidence (Berlinski, Galiani and Gertler, 2009<sub>[24]</sub>) highlight the short- and long-run benefits of ECEC on children's well-being as well as for families and society in general. As an OECD report on transitions between ECEC and primary education found, providing ECEC and primary education on the same premises can soften children's transition to school as children and parents usually do not have to change buildings and are already familiar with the space as well as staff (OECD, 2017<sub>[25]</sub>). In this respect, it is positive that children should attend one year of compulsory pre-school education which is offered within school clusters, potentially smoothing transitions.

Nevertheless, expanding the provision of pre-primary education, including in rural areas, and improving quality remain important challenges for Colombia to provide children with a strong foundation for life and for reducing the impact of their background on their outcomes in schooling and the labour market (see OECD (2016<sub>[14]</sub>) for an in-depth analysis of and recommendations on ECEC in Colombia). In 2016, only 53.6% of 5-year-olds were enrolled in the transition year according to their age, even though this

year is compulsory. In rural areas, this was only the case for 45.3% of children (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>). According to data from the OECD PISA 2015, Colombian students have on average less than two years of pre-school education, while the OECD average is three years, and the impact of attending pre-primary education on students' performance at a later stage of their schooling is lower than in other countries (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>).

Colombia promotes an integrated approach to early childhood development, which includes pre-primary education, and has made this a presidential priority with its Early Childhood Comprehensive Care Strategy *De Cero a Siempre*. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of children in comprehensive care almost doubled (MEN, 2017<sup>[26]</sup>). But the educational component of early childhood education remains underdeveloped and there are challenges to articulate provision and resources between two different systems – the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (*Instituto Colombiano para el Bienestar Familiar*, ICBF) manages ECEC services for 0-5 year-olds as explained in Chapter 1. In 2017, 38 000 out of about 276 000 5-6 year-olds attending ECEC services managed by the ICBF in the year before had not yet entered the transition year (MEN, 2018<sup>[17]</sup>).

Ensuring sufficient funding as analysed in Chapter 2 and improving data and information systems are particular challenges to expand access to high-quality provision and particularly so given the country's commitment for universal coverage in rural areas as part of the peace agreement. Based on the review visit, there are no quality data available on enrolment rates in the two previous pre-school years for 3- and 4-year-olds, for example.

*Policies strengthen demand for tertiary education, and encourage partnerships between schools, tertiary institutions and vocational providers*

The recent inclusion of upper secondary education as part of compulsory education is of paramount importance for Colombia. Completion of upper secondary education is increasingly regarded as the minimum required for full participation in society and the economy, not only in OECD countries but also more widely (OECD/Eurostat/UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015<sup>[27]</sup>). Upper secondary education allows students to consolidate and deepen the core skills needed to continue to tertiary education or enter the labour market (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). As research suggests, the extension of compulsory schooling can raise the education of those most likely to leave early, produce other social benefits, such as a reduction in crime, and benefit the children of those gaining higher levels of schooling as a result of this reform. Although costly to implement, investments may be offset by private returns, higher taxes and lower dependence on social welfare (Harmon, 2017<sup>[28]</sup>).

Since compulsory upper secondary education is only a recent development in Colombia, the country needs to strengthen the social demand for this level of education and articulate upper secondary with tertiary education and short vocational programmes offered by other providers. Expanding demand among rural youth will be a particular challenge considering lower levels of aspirations and expectations as analysed below. At a national level, promising policies have been put in place, even though this has also led to increasing budgetary pressures and an increasing resource allocation for tertiary education relative to school education as analysed in Chapter 2.

One of the most well-known initiatives of the government in office at the time of writing this report is *Ser Pilo Paga*, a scholarships programme for tertiary education for the best students from the most disadvantaged households. As the results of an evaluation of the short-term impact of the programme for the first two cohorts of 2014 and 2015 reveals,

the programme has contributed to closing the socio-economic gap for access to tertiary education (Alvarez et al, 2017).<sup>16</sup> There is also some evidence that the programme has contributed to improving the performance of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in the school leaving examination *Saber 11* (Laajaj, Moya and Sanchez, 2018<sup>[29]</sup>; Londono-Velez, Rodriguez and Sanchez, 2017<sup>[30]</sup>). As Urquiola (2015<sup>[31]</sup>) suggests, the organisation of the school system, labour market returns and access to tertiary education may play an important role in influencing students' efforts and attitudes to learning. Youth in Action (*Jóvenes en Acción*), a training programme for unemployed youth, is another noteworthy experience (see Box 3.1).

### Box 3.1. Youth in Action (*Más Jóvenes en Acción*)

The programme introduced in the early 2000s provides 3 months of classroom training (in a legally registered training institution) and a 3-month apprenticeship in a job (in the formal sector) to young people aged 18-25 belonging to the poorest parts of society classified in the two lowest levels of SISBEN – an information system designed to target social protection at families in need. Training institutions have to guarantee apprenticeships to be paid by the government for the provision of training, a conditionality that ensures institutions are offering courses and developing skills that are relevant for the labour market (Kugler et al., 2015<sup>[32]</sup>).

The programme entailed a randomised design and its short and long-term effects have been extensively documented. One of the most interesting findings regarding the programme is the complementarity between vocational training and formal education: relative to non-participants, randomly selected participants are more likely to complete secondary school and to attend and persist in tertiary education eight years after random assignment. Moreover, training also has educational spill over effects on participants' family members, who are more likely to enrol in tertiary education (Kugler et al., 2015<sup>[32]</sup>). Other remarkable results of the programme include improvements to both male and female labour market outcomes at a similar scale; and the programme proving to be a cost-effective approach to reducing informality and improving labour market outcomes in the long run (Attanasio et al., 2017<sup>[33]</sup>).

*Source:* Kugler, A. et al. (2015), "Long-term Direct and Spillover Effects of Job Training: Experimental Evidence from Colombia"; Attanasio, O. et al. (2017), "Vocational training for disadvantaged youth in Colombia: A long-term follow-up", <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/app.20150554>.

Furthermore, Secretaries of Education and schools are free and encouraged to establish individual partnerships with tertiary institutions and the National Learning Service (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje*, SENA).<sup>17</sup> The SENA, an institution providing short vocational programmes and technical and technological programmes at tertiary level (ISCED level 5) has fulfilled a key role in the provision of vocational upper secondary education since the 1990s when such partnerships were set out in the General Education Law. The SENA is the largest provider of vocational courses, with a presence in nearly half of all schools offering upper secondary education (Econometría Consultores, 2013<sup>[34]</sup>). The SENA also has an important role in rural and remote areas and in specific sectors such as agriculture and cattle raising, mining and informatics among others. The existence of such partnerships was clearly evident during the review visit with several

schools talking about their links or their plans to establish them. One rural school leader, for instance, told the team about plans to establish a programme in tourism together with the SENA. Another school leader provided examples of work with a local university in the area of information science.

Such partnerships, which are relatively rare among countries participating in the OECD School Resources Review, hold promises for both students and schools. They can provide orientation to students and enrich their upper secondary education, but also build the capacity of school staff. The SENA, for instance, provides staff with expertise in specific vocational fields, knowledge of the labour market and experience in entrepreneurship. An evaluation of partnerships between schools and tertiary institutions or the SENA suggests that partnerships have had a positive impact on basic competencies of rural students but not on students' entry into the labour market. The study however also identified some challenges, such as a high demand which is difficult to meet for the SENA, limited support by the Secretary of Education, and limited time and resources in schools (Econometría Consultores, 2013<sup>[34]</sup>).

Recent changes to the length of compulsory education heighten the urgency of establishing effective partnerships, and of articulating upper secondary education with programmes offered by the SENA, which students could traditionally choose after lower secondary education.

*The funding of private providers provides some flexibility in the provision of education and has ensured access for students in rural areas and conflict zones*

All Secretaries of Education must guarantee access to free education for their students. When a secretary has difficulties to ensure provision, it can contract a private provider through 4 different mechanisms which are regulated by Decree 1851 of 2015 and described in Annex 3.A. In 2017, 6.6% of the total public enrolment of 81.3% was provided by such government-dependent private schools.

The public funding of private providers has been a very important solution to ensure access to school education in areas with a changing student population. Expanding urban areas, rural to urban migration and the displacement of people through the conflict have all posed challenges for the planning of local school networks. Prior to the creation of a dedicated fund to finance educational infrastructure (*Fondo de Financiamiento de la Infraestructura Educativa*, FFIE) within the Full-Day Schooling programme, Colombia did not have a national policy to expand the supply of public education infrastructure. The contracting of private providers has also played an important role to provide access to education in rural and remote areas affected by the conflict.

These agreements have furthermore gained increasing relevance as a mechanism to ensure the provision of education to special groups of students. Some Secretaries of Education have been advancing the national policy for the recognition of students' special educational needs and any type of disability (Decree 1421 of 2017) through contracts with private providers. Similar strategies have been pursued to ensure access to education for children and young people in conflict with the justice system within the framework of the Adolescent Criminal Responsibility System (*Sistema de Responsabilidad Penal para Adolescentes*, SRPA). Likewise, since 2016 the recognition of greater autonomy for indigenous communities has been implemented in various Secretaries of Education through agreements with churches and other religious entities (more on this below).

In recent years, the government has reduced its reliance on public-private partnerships for the provision of education, given the improved coverage of the public school network and reduction of the total school-age population as explained in Chapter 1 (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>). In this context, many public schools have experienced a reduction of their regular enrolment, causing an excess of teaching staff. Therefore, the ministry has promoted the reduction of service contracts with private providers through Decree 1851 of 2015 and encouraged Secretaries of Education to provide education directly.

This trend can be observed in many large cities, such as Bogotá or Cali. Between 2010 and 2017, enrolments in publicly-funded private provision in urban areas declined by 48%. In rural areas, however, it has been more challenging to decrease reliance on private providers which is also linked to a lack of flexibility in the teacher labour market as analysed in Chapter 4. While enrolment in fully public provision in rural areas decreased by 8.9% between 2010 and 2016, enrolments in government-dependent private education increased slightly, by 2.4%. Latest enrolment data, however, indicate a changing trend. In 2017, 25.7% less students had to be enrolled in a school contracted by the Secretary of Education compared to 2016 (data provided by the ministry of education).<sup>18</sup>

### ***School governance***

*There are established platforms for strong community participation in schools, and initiatives are being developed to encourage parental engagement*

One of the most remarkable features of the Colombian education system is not only the promotion of stakeholder engagement at the national and territorial levels (e.g. through national and local education forums) but also community participation in school.

The General Education Law defines the school community as students, teachers, parents and guardians, alumni, school leaders and school managers, and they are expected to participate in the design and implementation of the school educational project, ensuring a shared vision among the members of the school community. Each school must have a directive council comprised of representatives of all of the above-mentioned groups plus a representative of the local productive sector. The key role of the directive council is clearly in evidence in principals' reports about decision-making for the OECD PISA 2015 (see Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2).

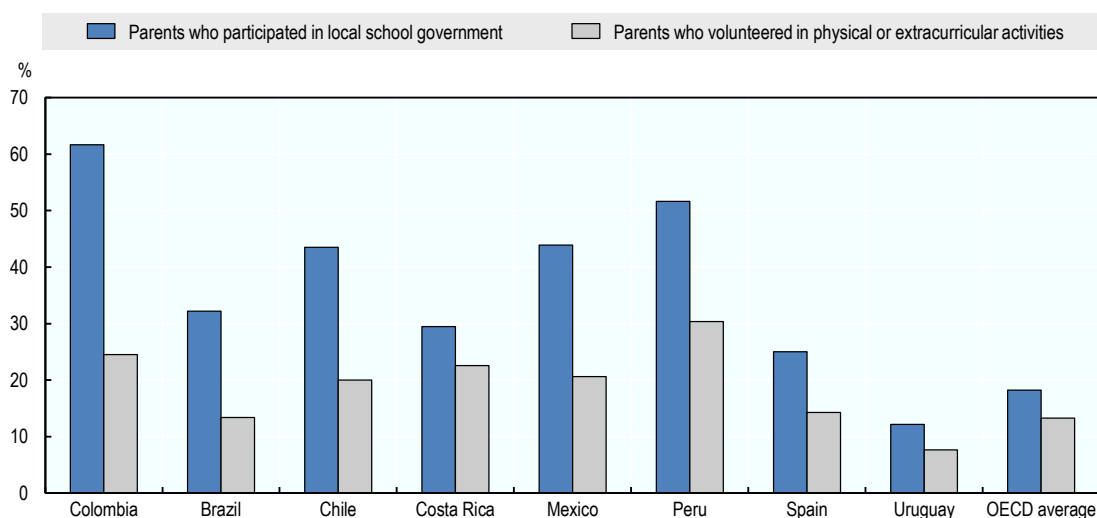
Besides this council, several other bodies within the school give students, parents and teachers the opportunity to participate directly in school management. In rural communities, *Juntas de Acción Comunal*, local civil society organisations, are also involved in school management, mainly providing a link between school and community to departments and municipalities. Compared to OECD and Latin American countries, data from PISA 2015 suggest relatively high participation of parents in school government in Colombia, as shown in Figure 3.3.

Out-of-school factors account for the vast majority of differences in educational achievement. Families are the first social unit in which children learn and develop as is also recognised in the General Education Law (Arts. 4 and 7). It is not surprising, then, that interactions with parents have consistently been shown to influence students' achievement, expectations, attitudes and psychological health. Parents are also key players in helping their children succeed at school and engaging parents in students' learning at school can play a crucial role for students' success (Kraft and Rogers, 2015<sup>[35]</sup>; OECD, 2017<sup>[36]</sup>). Close links between the school and the community in rural areas can

also help sustain rural schools and communities (Echazarra and Radinger, forthcoming<sup>[3]</sup>; OECD, forthcoming<sup>[20]</sup>).

**Figure 3.3. Relationship of schools with parents and the community, PISA 2015**

Results based on school principals' reports



Source: OECD (2017), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume V): Collaborative Problem Solving*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264285521-en>, Table V.7.36.

Research for Colombia has shown that, within schools, parents are seen as key allies in students' education and school improvement processes (Martínez and Celis, 2016<sup>[37]</sup>). Accordingly, several initiatives in Colombia have aimed to raise public awareness about the importance of education and the need for parents' to be involved in and committed with their children's education. The Education Excellence Day (*Día de la Excelencia Educativa* or *Día E*), for instance, is implemented every year in view of analysing the results of the school performance index ISCE and initiating a plan for improvement.

Another initiative is the creation of parents' schools (*Escuelas de Padres y Madres*), through Law 1404 of 2010. The aim of this programme, developed through a participatory methodology but not yet implemented, is to involve families and the whole education community in their children's education. To further improve this programme, the ministry has established contracts with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) to help parents participate in school activities and *Red PaPaz* (the country's largest parents' organisation) to promote the creation of parent schools throughout the country. Parent schools should develop parental skills for supporting their children's learning. Both initiatives were scheduled to start operating in 2018 (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

Despite these noteworthy initiatives, there still seems to be room to further develop strategies to promote parental involvement in children's education, bearing in mind that school enrolment still needs to increase (especially in pre-school and upper secondary education) and dropout rates are still high, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, various schools the review team visited reported organising workshops for parents, but also mentioned that it is difficult to get parents involved, due to work commitments and time constraints, for example, or the limited education of parents in rural areas.<sup>19</sup>



More generally, there is scope to ensure community participation in schools not only in theory but also in practice, including involvement of disadvantaged community members with less voice in rural and remote areas (Rivera Sepúlveda, 2016<sup>[38]</sup>). This may point to the need for particular strategies for parental engagement in rural schools. Student representatives also reported that students' voice is not always heard in school decision-making, in the definition of the school handbook, for example. Creating a positive school climate and fighting school violence represent ongoing challenges as analysed below.

### ***The organisation of teaching and learning***

#### *Flexible models provide pedagogical approaches to meet diverse needs, such as those of children and youth in rural areas, and students affected by the conflict*

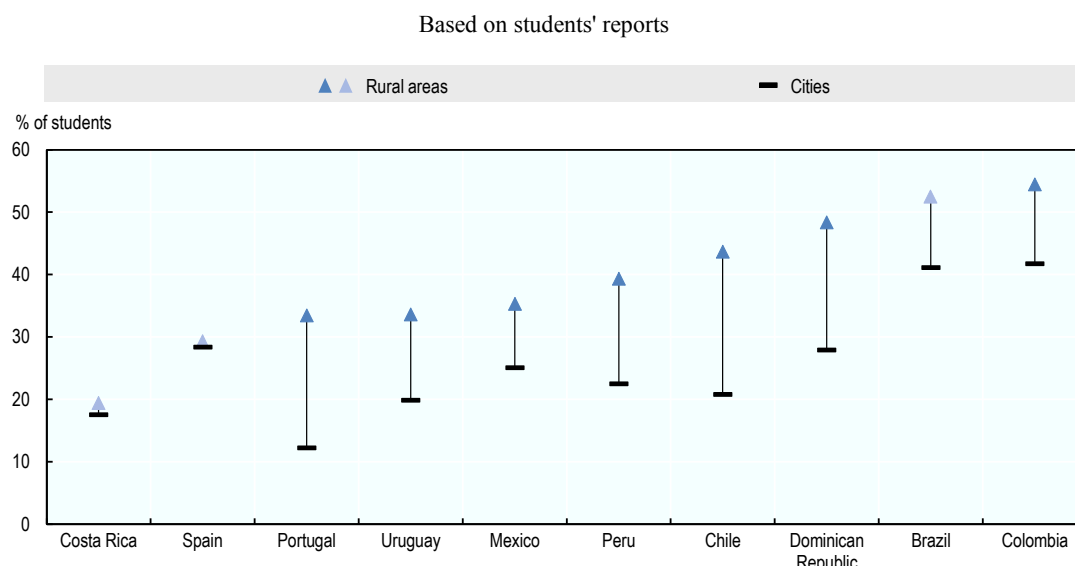
Colombia has a long history of designing and implementing flexible school models. While using different pedagogical approaches, most models share a common emphasis on engaging students with their local context and providing a more flexible schedule and learning environment than traditional schools, addressing the needs of a linguistically, culturally and geographically diverse country (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>).

Flexible models have expanded access to education, especially for students in rural and remote areas or from disadvantaged groups, e.g. by providing options for youth who take on family responsibilities, such as domestic work or raising younger siblings (Montero and Uccelli, 2016<sup>[39]</sup>). Based on Colombia's Quality of Life Survey (*Encuesta de Calidad de Vida*, ECV) for 2015, around 42% of young men in rural and urban areas not studying stated having to work as the main reason for leaving school; a similar share of young girls in rural areas stated domestic work (Pardo, 2017<sup>[40]</sup>). The pressure to reconcile work and study also clearly emerges from data of the OECD PISA 2015 (see Figure 3.4).

Flexible models have also played an important role in the context of Colombia's conflict and the potential to do so for the construction of a post-conflict society, e.g. through accelerated learning for displaced students and second-chance programmes for former child combatants. The Peace Accords with the FARC entail the design of a Special Rural Education Plan (*Plan Especial de Educación Rural*, PEER) and a Peace Education Plan (*Plan de Educación para la Paz*) with the aim of closing the gaps between urban and rural population and reintegrating the demobilised population in the education system (see also Chapters 1 and 2).

In this context, FUCE PAZ, an organisation of former FARC members, has been designing a flexible model to provide education to demobilised groups in co-ordination with the ministry. While a number of factors are important for successfully reintegrating ex-combatants into society and preventing them from returning to illegal activities or armed groups, education seems to be valued by former guerrilla combatants and to aid them in following alternative life paths (Kaplan and Nussio, 2016<sup>[41]</sup>).

Most of the existing flexible models were designed and began their implementation under the umbrella of the Rural Education Programme (*Programa de Educación Rural*, PER), which included the implementation of flexible models adapted to the needs of the rural community (see also Chapter 1 for a description of the programme). The programme was crucial to heighten the system's attention to rural education. Rodríguez, Sánchez and Armenta (2010<sup>[42]</sup>) evaluated the impact of the programme and found positive and significant effects on efficiency (dropout, pass and failure rates) and quality (achievement in standardised language assessment) in the schools where it was implemented.

**Figure 3.4. Students who work for pay outside of school, PISA 2015**

*Notes:* Rural areas refer to communities with fewer than 3 000 people, cities to communities with 100 000 or more people.

Statistically significant gaps between rural areas and cities are marked in a darker tone.

Countries are ranked in ascending order of the share of 15-year-olds in rural areas working for pay outside of school.

*Source:* Adjusted from Echazarra, A. and T. Radinger (forthcoming), “The challenges and opportunities of delivering rural education: Evidence from PISA and TALIS”, *OECD Education Working Paper Series*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

The authors concluded that the success of the programme greatly relied on its design which took into account the specific characteristics and situation of rural students in each municipality where it was implemented, responding to the needs of each community. Flexible models have also emerged out of local initiatives and inspired similar initiatives in other countries, such as the *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial* (Tutorial Learning System or SAT) developed by FUNDAEC from the 1970s onwards.

Not all flexible models, however, have been equally successful. The most well-known and effective model is without doubt *Escuela Nueva*, which provides basic education to rural and remote populations through multi-grade teaching. The programme emphasises teachers’ learning about multi-grade teaching as well as opportunities for professional interaction with teachers in other schools; the provision for students and teachers of instructional materials and textbooks that facilitate self-guided learning appropriate for multi-grade classes; the application of pedagogies that see students as active participants in the learning process; and the involvement of the school community in the management and organisation of schools.

McEwan (1998<sup>[43]</sup>) found that New Schools are better endowed with inputs like textbooks and place greater emphasis on active learning than traditional rural schools, but that many New Schools have not implemented all the above-mentioned elements. Regarding their effectiveness, the author found positive and statistically significant effects on language and mathematics achievement in Year 3 and language in Year 5. In a later work,

Benveniste and McEwan (2000<sub>[44]</sub>) sought to explain the great deal of variation in the adoption of new pedagogies in *Escuela Nueva*.

In this study, the authors found that the provision of training (as well as a range of formal qualifications and personal characteristics) only explains a very small portion of the variation in the adoption of new pedagogies. As they suggest, it is teacher motivation and commitment that might explain much of the remaining variation. Although the model has shown potential to foster positive learning outcomes, and the *Escuela Nueva* Foundation promotes the adequate implementation of the model, a review of the learning materials for implementation by the ministry of education (the model is implemented by different actors and organisations) found that many are outdated, not relevant for all students or conducive to developing complex problem-solving skills (OECD, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>).

Flexible models have facilitated the rapid expansion of education, particularly in rural and remote areas, but there have been more general concerns about the quality they provide and the need for further complementary measures to address the needs of disadvantaged students (more on this below). A review of the main flexible models found that the capacity for implementation and the results these different models achieve vary greatly. The review proposed that models can be classified into two groups: those that have consolidated and scaled up over the past decades, and those that have been of a very limited scale and impact (Econometría Consultores and SEI, 2014<sub>[45]</sub>).

The same study identified several problems with the institutional arrangements for the implementation of flexible school models: i) limited local capacity to identify the most suitable model and to effectively implement it; ii) weak local management evidenced in the proliferation of models and the difficulty of creating pathways between the flexible models and traditional schooling; and iii) teachers' poor preparation and lack of resources (Econometría Consultores and SEI, 2014<sub>[45]</sub>).

*Policies and initiatives are in place to provide an education that is sensitive to the needs of ethnic minorities, including indigenous students in rural areas*

Colombia is a multicultural and multilingual country with a total of 102 different ethnic groups, 65 indigenous and 2 Afro-Colombian languages as well as the Romani language of the Rrom as described in Chapter 1. The government, in general, and education, in particular, have been sensitive to the needs of the country's ethnic groups as enshrined in the Constitution, developing a wide array of ethnic education models. Considering the concentration of indigenous peoples in rural areas, ethnic education is crucial for providing a high-quality education for all students in rural parts of the country.

Generally, ethnic communities must be consulted on all public policy issues that concern them, including education. And ethnic communities have considerable autonomy to organise their own schools and curriculum (e.g. through the development of their *Proyecto Educativo Comunitario*, PEC). Community organisations – the *Cabildos Indígenas* for indigenous groups and the *Consejos Comunitarios* for the Afro-Colombian population – have the potential to play an important role in this, while the ministry provides advice and support for the formulation, design and implementation of communities' own educational projects.

By 2017, a total of 106 projects had been enacted, both for indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities (Sánchez, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>). In 2017, for instance, a particular model for the Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific region had been recognised (*Modelo Etnoeducación para Comunidades Negras del Pacífico Colombiano*).

While ethnic education has not reached all communities, experienced heterogeneous implementation and been criticised for national or local authorities not always respecting the experience and knowledge of the different communities (Castillo, 2008<sup>[46]</sup>), there are successful examples. Indigenous groups such as the Wayyu and the Arhuaco have a long history of developing their own pedagogical approaches and methods appropriate to their particular traditions, history, language and cosmology.

As representatives of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*, CRIC) reported for the review team's preliminary meetings, the community has established more than 700 bilingual schools that respect their culture, values and traditions, such as recognising the role of the elders in the community and supporting intergenerational learning. The community has developed models for educating its own teachers through peer learning and collective education, engages in research on the learning processes of children from the community and has established language revitalisation and indigenous pedagogy programmes. The CRIC has also established an autonomous indigenous and intercultural university (*Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural*).

There is also some evidence that suggests that, when implemented appropriately, ethnic education can have a positive effect on students and communities. In a recent study, Palacios, Sánchez and Córdoba (2015<sup>[47]</sup>) found that the education provided in schools following an ethnic education programme in the Pacific region can improve students' results in standardised assessments. Based on qualitative information, the authors suggest that pedagogical practices within the classroom provide students with formal and informal institutional support that boosts their self-esteem and improves their learning processes. Classroom practices in these schools were based on principles of interculturality, progression, autonomy and community participation.

Research on the impact of intercultural and bilingual education on the academic achievement of indigenous students in other contexts in Latin America with larger indigenous populations (such as Mexico and Peru) is not conclusive. Studies however similarly suggest that such programmes have the potential to contribute to reducing achievements gaps, if properly implemented (e.g. through adequate teacher preparation) (Hynsjö and Damon, 2016<sup>[48]</sup>; Santibañez, 2016<sup>[49]</sup>).

Beyond these models of ethnic education, the government has further responded to calls by ethnic communities for greater autonomy through the creation of ethnic groups' own intercultural education systems (*Sistemas Educativos Propios e Interculturales*) (MEN, 2014<sup>[18]</sup>). Among these, the *Sistema Educativo Indígena Propio* (SEIP) is the most developed but has still not been approved. A similar system is expected in the future for Afro-Colombian populations. The design and implementation of any of these systems require constant stakeholder consultation with ethnic communities.

Despite these positive developments, there are some aspects that raise concerns and should be more carefully examined in the future. This includes the time and process required for developing ethnic groups' own intercultural systems, their relationship with the rest of the system, and financing and oversight. Lastly, Colombia has not yet developed a broader intercultural and multilingual approach to education which applies to all schools and not only to those serving ethnic communities in particular. In light of internal migration, intercultural education is increasingly relevant not only in rural but also urban areas (Cortina, 2017<sup>[50]</sup>). While Afro-Colombian studies should be part of the curriculum of all schools, for example, it is unclear to what extent this has been

implemented across the system, particularly bearing in mind the general challenge for schools to develop and implement their own curricula as analysed below.

*School self-evaluation and development are encouraged, and initiatives promote reflection about and the use of assessment results*

While there are no external reviews of school processes, central guidelines encourage school improvement and development (e.g. *Guía para el mejoramiento institucional*). Every school is expected to evaluate itself on an annual basis with the school community, identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement. During the review visit, the team could observe some school development and evaluation practices. Most of the schools visited mentioned the implementation of annual self-evaluation processes. Compared to various other countries in the region, self-evaluation seems to be more developed in Colombia as data from the OECD PISA 2015 suggest (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>).<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the review team had some concerns about the quality of these processes. It was unclear to what extent they involved the whole community and different sites across a school cluster, including rural sites. It was also clear that most of schools' attention was devoted to improving students' performance in standardised assessments, and that not all schools will have the capacity to evaluate their processes (also see Table 3.6 below).

Standardised assessments (*Pruebas Saber*) are the cornerstone of Colombia's approach to school evaluation (see Table 3.5). They have played a key role in shifting the focus towards students' learning outcomes and are linked to strategies to promote the use of results in schools. As an OECD review of evaluation and assessment in education highlighted, information on where students stand in their learning and the progress they have made is key to designing strategies for the further improvement of teaching and learning in classrooms, schools and the system as a whole (OECD, 2013<sup>[51]</sup>).

During the review visit, Colombian school principals, teachers and even students informed the team how they were focused on improving assessments results. School actors were keenly aware of the results of their school in standardised assessments, and how they compared to other schools in the region and the country. The introduction of the school performance index ISCE in 2015 has given further prominence to the assessments and made their results widely known to the school community.

The ministry of education and ICFES also encourage the use of assessment results for improvement, and there is some evidence that this is the case to some extent. The *Día E* has been officially incorporated into schools' academic calendar to review the school quality. Results from the ISCE, the *Pruebas Saber* and the school's self-evaluation often lead to the elaboration and implementation of school improvement plans. Assessment results are also taken into account during the five weeks of institutional development throughout the school year. Aware of the need to further disseminate the results of the evaluations and promote the use of results to shape processes, the ministry has implemented the *Siempre Día E* strategy providing additional support in the form of material and workshops. Also, the ICFES promotes the use of assessment results through written materials and training at the regional and school level throughout the country.

Moreover, given their increasing importance for Colombian education, the evaluation institute ICFES has refined the assessments to increase their reliability and allow comparisons over time. Nevertheless, there are some concerns raised by the research community both about validity and comparability and the effective use of results for policy-making (Molano, Rodríguez Gómez and Bayona, 2017<sup>[52]</sup>).

**Table 3.5. Student assessment in Colombia, PISA 2015**

Percentage of students in schools where students are assessed using the following methods at least once a year:

	Mandatory standardised tests	Non-mandatory standardised tests	Teacher-developed tests
<b>Colombia</b>	<b>74.8</b>	<b>82.9</b>	<b>62.8</b>
Brazil	64.0	80.2	70.3
Chile	98.2	71.7	84.6
Costa Rica	24.8	16.9	54.2
Mexico	58.4	31.9	41.9
Peru	64.5	55.8	76.2
Spain	46.2	53.5	91.7
Uruguay	36.9	15.7	79.6
<b>OECD average</b>	<b>76.2</b>	<b>68.0</b>	<b>65.5</b>

Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>, Tables II.4.20, II.4.21, II.4.22, II.4.24.

## Challenges

### *School network*

*School clusters in practice create challenges for school management and potential inequalities, especially for students in small rural and remote sites*

School clusters entail a series of advantages as previously explained in this chapter, but the way school clusters are organised and managed in practice requires further attention.

The criteria to define the number and size of sites per main school are not clear. As a report from Econometría (2013<sup>[5]</sup>) shows, the number of sites per school varies greatly, with some schools having more than 20 sites, others only 1 or 2. In principle, Secretaries of Education would cluster schools based on geographical proximity, but there is no clear definition of geographical proximity (there is evidence that some rural sites are very far away from their main school) nor is there an established upper limit to the number of sites a school may have. This situation leads to extreme cases in which school principals, possibly located in the main site in an urban area, are not fully aware of all sites under their leadership (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

Moreover, schools' human and financial resources are assigned based on the number of students, without taking into account the number of sites and the distance between them and the main school. For instance, the number of co-ordinators per school is determined by the number of students enrolled in the school without considering the number of sites. If a school has between 901 and 1 400 students, the Secretary of Education will appoint 2 co-ordinators (see Table 3.2). In one school, this number of students may be divided up among one main school plus two sites. In this case, the school principal and the two co-ordinators are able to split the job to ensure each site has the support of a school leader. In another school, the same number of students may be divided up in one main school plus five sites, which means that some of the sites would not have constant support from a school leader or may even have no support at all.

During the review visit, the team encountered some sites with a similar number of students as the main site but no school leader. Garcia et al. (2016<sup>[21]</sup>) found that schools in

urban areas have on average a higher number of co-ordinators and counsellors per site compared to rural schools, while rural schools have on average a larger number of sites. This clearly represents a challenge for school leadership and management, and the provision of rural education.

Evidently, this situation constitutes a source of potential inequalities in the provision of education, particularly for students in rural and remote school sites. A school with several sites makes for principals overburdened with administrative work, reduces their time for pedagogical leadership and decreases the possibility for co-ordinators to visit all sites as often as desirable. It seems that some sites and their teachers and students – especially those in remote areas – are left without pedagogical support and advice on the quality of their teaching and learning environment. A large school cluster with many individual sites at great distances makes it difficult for school leaders to build a shared educational vision and project among sites and their staff and communities. Furthermore, large school clusters make it challenging to take advantage of potential benefits, e.g. professional learning among teachers or making the best use of staff by assigning teachers to work with students on different sites over the course of a school day.

The same applies to technical-pedagogical support from the Secretaries of Education, particularly those of departments responsible for the provision of education in a large geographical area, which may include many remote sites. Given the Secretaries' limited number of staff, the latter is more likely to focus its support on main school sites, leaving remote school sites unattended.

*The planning of school networks and the organisation of transport and boarding arrangements is unclear, which are especially important in remote areas*

In theory, governance arrangements facilitate the effective planning of school networks in Colombia. As experience from the OECD School Resources Review highlights, a clear division of responsibilities and leadership for the school network can facilitate efficient planning, reduce undesirable competition and increase the potential for co-operation among schools (OECD, forthcoming<sub>[20]</sub>).

In Colombia, Secretaries of Education are responsible for the planning of their school network from pre-school to upper secondary education, which can facilitate a flexible use of facilities. Departments can play a strong steering role for the network across their non-certified municipalities. A closer look at the public school network for the country as a whole provides indications of an ongoing adjustment of provision. Between 2010 and 2017, the number of main sites decreased by almost 30%, from 13 670 to 9 881. The number of sites remained largely stable, with a small increase from 43 860 to 44 033 sites according to data provided by the ministry of education. While further analysis is needed, these numbers may suggest a recent trend towards larger school clusters.

Overall, however, it is largely unclear how Secretaries of Education plan and adjust their school networks, including provision in rural and remote areas, and how they work together with the local communities and, in the case of departments, with their non-certified municipalities. It is also unclear to what extent the quality of education is considered. The pressure to clarify processes for the planning of school networks is likely to mount in the future, given the need to plan expanding networks for pre-school and upper secondary education and the effective implementation of full-day schooling (OECD, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>). García et al. (2016<sub>[21]</sub>), for instance, find a strong link between the presence of upper secondary education in rural areas and enrolments at this level.



School networks need to be planned alongside transport and boarding arrangements. In remote rural areas, adequate policies for transport and boarding are essential to guarantee students' access to school and transitions between sites and levels of education. As analysed in Chapter 2, resources for these services are, however, limited. Concerning student transport, technical guidelines provided by the ministry responsible for transport (*MinTransporte*) in collaboration with the ministry of education are reportedly difficult to comply with in rural areas given geographical diversity. At the same time, safety standards are essential to ensure students' health and well-being.

Transport criteria that fail to provide effective guidance can also make it difficult for Secretaries of Education to assess the cost and feasibility of plans to restructure their school network and anticipate problems that may arise from students' increasing distance to their schools (OECD, forthcoming<sub>[20]</sub>). Adequate transport is crucial when school sites are closed, be it for low enrolment, a reorganisation of schools or natural disasters. Between 2014 and 2017, between 850 and 1 300 school sites across the country were closed per year according to ministry reports. The absence of effective school transport furthermore places a burden on families who lack the time or resources to bring their young children to school (OECD, forthcoming<sub>[20]</sub>).

Boarding schools in Colombia were created decades ago, mainly in rural areas affected by violence and poverty, to ensure students remain in education. Information listed in SIMAT, the country's information system for the enrolment of students in public schools, on the total number of boarding schools is unclear. However, the ministry of education estimates a total of 560 boarding schools in 29 Secretaries of Education belonging to 23 departments, with an enrolment of 36 060 full-time boarding school students, 15 852 part-time, and 91 853 external students.<sup>21</sup> Most of these boarding schools are located in the Orinoco and Amazonas regions, with the departments of Caquetá, Casanare, Guaviare, Meta, Putumayo, Vaupés and Vichada, having more than 47 boarding schools each. Boarding schools have however been insufficiently regulated and often lack adequate infrastructure, staff and other services, such as sufficient meals (Sánchez, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>).

*Challenges remain to develop an education offer that is engaging to all students, also in rural areas, and supports their transition to the local labour market*

While the aforementioned policies to strengthen demand for tertiary education and improve the pedagogical offer at upper secondary level point into the right direction, developing secondary education remains a crucial task for the years to come, including in rural and remote areas with particularly low enrolment at this level.

As García et al. (2016<sub>[21]</sub>) claim, the competency standards that should be developed in upper secondary education are not clearly defined and programmes are extremely diverse and specific. The offer of general and vocational upper secondary programmes is not always pertinent to the needs of students in their context. The authors in fact found that young people aged 14-18 years reported a lack of interest in education as the main reason for not attending school. The difficulty to provide students in all regions of the country with an educational offer that matches their interests was also evident in the review team's visit. Partnerships with tertiary institutions and the National Learning Service (SENA) seemed to be sometimes driven by supply rather than an analysis of students' interests and the local labour market. Students in rural areas also have less choice, given that rural schools seem to specialise more and offer either a general or a vocational

programme (García et al., 2016<sup>[21]</sup>). Another school with a different upper secondary specialisation may be too far for students to access.

Some strategies, such as *Ser Pilo Paga* mentioned above, but also the campaign Mobilising Demand in Tertiary Education (*Movilización de la Demanda*), which provides guidance on the labour market through a dedicated website, have the potential to raise student interest in staying in school and continuing to tertiary education (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). School counsellors (*docentes orientadores*) – whose role entails career guidance – can also play a key role within schools in motivating students to stay until the end of upper secondary education. They can inform students of the expected benefits of completing this level and help those interested in continuing their education in their transition to tertiary education. Despite their key role, however, there is a severe shortage of counsellors and staff seem to require further training (Acosta, García and Maldonado, 2016<sup>[53]</sup>).<sup>22</sup>

The perceived lack of perspectives and lower educational aspirations is a particular problem in rural areas, even in countries where rural students outperform their urban peers (Echazarra and Radinger, forthcoming<sup>[3]</sup>). This is also the case in Colombia, as analysed in Chapter 1. While educational aspirations are relatively high in Colombia overall, 15-year-olds in rural areas were 42% less likely to expect to complete at least a university degree than their urban peers (OECD, 2017<sup>[36]</sup>). According to Sanchez (2018<sup>[1]</sup>), the system has failed to adapt to new realities and is not offering rural students an appropriate vocational upper secondary education for the current rurality. Developing vocational options requires adequate resources for equipment and materials as well as specialised teaching staff. This may be part of the reason why rural schools largely offer general programmes, and rarely both types of programmes as found by García et al. (2016<sup>[21]</sup>).

Pedagogical Productive Projects (*Proyectos Pedagógicos Productivos*) have the potential to provide students with the opportunity to develop relevant skills, including entrepreneurial ones, that respond to their local context. But schools require greater capacity to provide their students with opportunities to develop such projects (López and Serrano, 2012<sup>[54]</sup>). Upper secondary students must dedicate 80 hours of their education to a civic service. Rural students may dedicate this time to agricultural, ecological or similar projects for the benefit of their community. Teachers and school leaders may, however, also require further guidance to plan meaningful experiences for their students.

The limited presence of higher education institutions in rural areas is likely a further explanation for lower aspirations. Moreover, it can put schools in rural areas at a disadvantage, as compared to urban schools, in creating links with tertiary institutions (Econometría Consultores, 2013<sup>[34]</sup>). Regional Higher Education Centres (*Centros Regionales de Educación Superior*, CERES), partnerships between tertiary institutions, public authorities and employers established since 2003, may provide some opportunities, but their further development has been unclear in recent years (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>).

*The quality assurance mechanisms for funding private providers raises concerns for quality, and a large independent private sector risks social segregation*

The quality of publicly-funded private schools in Colombia is considered very variable. Evaluations regarding the impact of concession schools (*colegios en concesión*) – a model of public funding for private schools that has since been discontinued – differed with respect to the Secretaries of Education that implemented these partnerships. This

clearly highlights the need to replicate best practices for the provision of education through partnerships with private providers for the system as a whole.

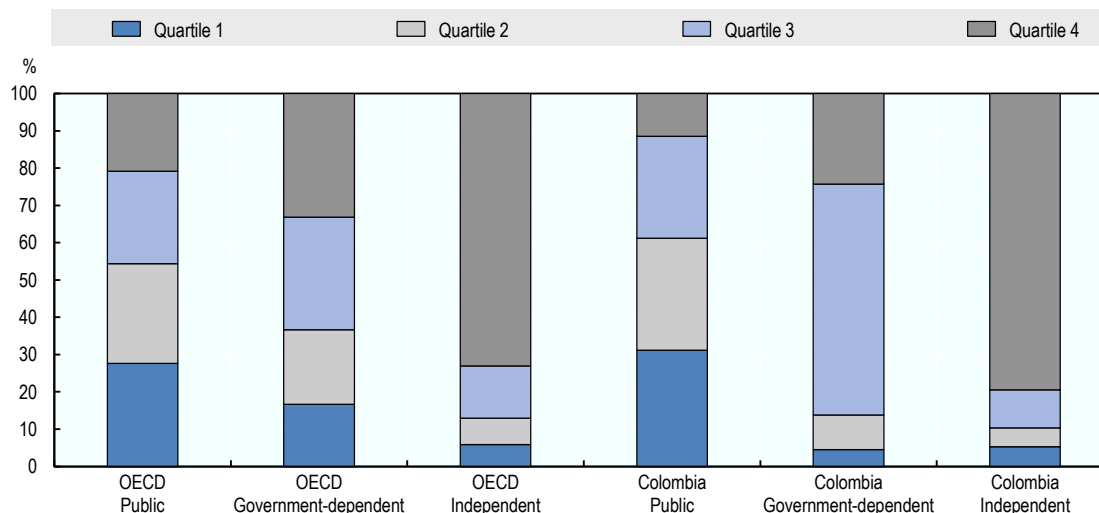
For example, an evaluation for public provision awarded in concession in Medellín (Barrientos and Rios Gallego, 2007<sup>[55]</sup>) showed that students in these publicly-funded private schools obtained lower academic results and were more likely to repeat a year or drop out of school than their peers in public schools. Conversely, in Bogotá, publicly-funded private schools showed better results. An evaluation of the concessions programme launched in 1999 showed that this modality entailed a lower dropout rate and better results in standardised assessments (Barrera-Osorio, 2007<sup>[56]</sup>).

Colombia has in place a relatively strong regulatory framework for all private schools, including those without public funding. The fees that can be charged in independent private schools, for instance, depend on annual self-evaluations and the school performance index ISCE (for further details, see Sánchez (2018<sup>[1]</sup>)). But the use and quality assurance of the public contracting of private providers seem to require further attention. A report by the ministry of finance for 2013 criticised excessive contracting due to information and management problems and an inefficient use of teaching staff and available resources (MinHacienda, 2015<sup>[57]</sup>). Since then, new regulations have been put in place with Decree 1851 in 2015. The new regulations seem to have already achieved part of their goal of reducing the use of private providers, at least in urban areas. However, their long-term impact, including on the quality of provision, is still unclear.

A number of other challenges still raise concerns about the use of private providers. There is little information on how supervision works in practice and how quality standards are enforced (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). Regulations on minimum standards focus on outcomes (see Annex 3.A) but do not prescribe the monitoring of processes. As analysed below, the capacity of Secretaries of Education in general varies widely, also raising concerns about the quality assurance of publicly-funded private providers, particularly in regions with less capacity. This includes rural areas, where it has been more difficult to reduce the use of private contracts, although latest enrolment data indicate a large decrease in 2016-17.

It is furthermore relatively unclear how students are assigned to publicly-funded private schools in the event demand cannot be met – an important equity question – and the current databases make it difficult to monitor enrolments. The nature of contracts makes it difficult to offer transparency about costs. Secretaries of Education may, for example, provide public teachers or own the school building, which would not be accounted for in the contracting database (*Formato Único de Contratación*, FUC). Lastly, a large share of contracts only last one year, which poses challenges for providers to ensure a quality education and makes for a lack of continuity for students.

On the other hand, advantaged students are highly concentrated in the private school sector – particularly in independent private schools – while students of lower socio-economic background are over-represented in both public and government-dependent private schools. Based on data from the OECD PISA 2015, only 37% of 15-year-olds from the most advantaged quartile (as measured by the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status) attended public schools, compared to 95% of students from the least advantaged quartile. By contrast, 59% of the most advantaged students attended independent private schools, compared to only 4% of the country's least advantaged quartile (see Figure 3.5) (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>).

**Figure 3.5. Type of institution by student socio-economic background, PISA 2015**

*Notes:* Public schools are those managed by a public education authority, government agency, or governing board appointed by a government or elected by public franchise. Private schools refer to schools managed directly or indirectly by a non-government organisation, such as a church, trade union, business or other private institution. Depending on whether or not they receive funding from the government, private schools can be considered as government-independent (50% or more of their funding comes from private sources) or government-dependent (at least 50% of their funding comes from the government).

Since some principals of private schools did not answer to the question about funding, the percentage of students attending public schools may be overestimated.

Quartiles refer to schools' socio-economic profile based on the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status.

*Source:* OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>, Table II.4.10 Table II.4.11, Table II.4.12.

This high social concentration of students by type of institution does not mean that Colombia presents a high degree of social segregation among all of its schools. The segregation of 15-year-olds across schools, based on their parents' occupation, was below the OECD average. Overall, the level of segregation as measured by PISA was comparable with that of Uruguay, slightly lower than in Brazil and Mexico and significantly less pronounced than in Chile and Peru. As in many countries in the region, more than 20% of the between-school segregation is explained by differences in the social composition of private and public schools. Among the 66 countries with available data, Colombia has the sixth highest degree of segregation between public and private schools (OECD, 2017<sup>[36]</sup>). In other words, although the general composition of schools is relatively diverse, private schools are highly homogeneous, especially with respect to more advantaged students.

Accumulated evidence at international level shows that this socio-economic segregation leads to an important gap in educational opportunities between schools and students since the socio-economic and cultural capital of families is a major factor in explaining school performance. These schools generally have better conditions of equipment and materials, and it is more attractive for teachers and school leaders to work in schools where children's learning is facilitated (Valenzuela, Bellei and Ríos, 2013<sup>[58]</sup>). For Colombia, evidence from the OECD PISA 2015 shows no differences in the performance of public and government-dependent private schools, but a significantly higher performance of students in independent private schools. Most of this difference disappears when

controlling for students' and schools' socio-economic status, although a significant gap remains, which may be explained by private schools' ability to charge parental fees, among others (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>).

Analyses of data from Colombia's school leaving examinations in Year 11 yield similar results. These analyses show that most of the performance gap between public and private schools disappears when controlling for socio-economic differences at the student and school level. The remaining private-school advantage only holds for schools that charge high monthly fees to families (Heras Recuero and Olaberria, 2018<sup>[59]</sup>), and is reversed once schooling fees are taken into account (García et al., 2013<sup>[60]</sup>).

### *School governance*

*Pedagogical leadership in schools needs to be significantly strengthened, also to make the most of school autonomy and to make school clusters work*

School leadership is the second most important school-level factor (after classroom instruction) influencing student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004<sup>[61]</sup>; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008<sup>[62]</sup>) and often the foundation for sustainable school improvement (Bellei et al., 2016<sup>[63]</sup>). One explanation for school leadership's significant effects on the quality of school organisation and student learning and development is probably that leadership serves as a catalyst for the potential capacities that already exist within schools (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008<sup>[64]</sup>). Effective school leaders exercise pedagogical leadership, fulfilling their role as a supporter and developer of staff, planner of teaching and leader of educational work so as to ensure that the school operates as effectively as possible within the specified parameters (Augustine et al., 2009<sup>[65]</sup>; Taipale, 2012<sup>[66]</sup>). Such leadership is focused on influencing what happens inside classrooms and improving teaching and learning, with leaders being role models for colleagues (NCSL, 2007<sup>[67]</sup>).

In Colombia, the fundamental role of school leaders within schools is acknowledged in most official guidelines and policy documents. For instance, the ministry's Manual of Functions, Requirements and Competencies for School Leaders and Teachers, promotes a broad and distributed vision of school leadership, which includes rural directors and co-ordinators as part of the school leadership team (MEN, 2016<sup>[8]</sup>). Schools in Colombia also provide opportunities for teacher leadership and involvement in decision-making as analysed in Chapter 4. However, in practice, school principals in Colombia face limitations in being pedagogical leaders, mainly because they devote most of their time to administrative and financial aspects. Moreover, academic co-ordinators are also busy dealing with administrative aspects and the school climate. During the review visit, the team observed that co-ordinators typically devote a lot of time to resolve conflicts in schools, and to administrative tasks such as co-ordinating school meals.

School principals are not fulfilling their role as pedagogical leaders, which creates challenges for developing and managing teachers effectively in schools as analysed in depth in Chapter 4. They have limited opportunities to provide their teachers with formative feedback based on regular evaluations and classroom observations, particularly for those employed under the old statute. Furthermore, implementing annual mandatory performance evaluations for teachers – as required by the new teacher statute – has proven to be challenging for school leaders who do not seem to be giving much attention to preparing teachers for their evaluations and developing teachers' understanding of the process and criteria that are used. They also have a very limited influence on staff decisions (e.g. influencing the recruitment and dismissal of teachers, appointing their

leadership team, etc.) which limits their possibility to shape their school's pedagogical profile. Above all, school leaders do not seem equipped to develop a high-quality learning environment for students and collaborative practices within their schools – challenges which are even more pronounced in school clusters with distant sites in rural areas.

The country is thus facing a paradoxical situation with considerable autonomy for schools to determine their curriculum and pedagogical approaches, but very little attention to developing the leadership capacity of schools. The organisation of schools into school clusters also requires school leaders that manage the complexities of school clusters effectively as explained above (e.g. for creating learning communities and scheduling time for collaboration among their staff, including in rural sites). School capacity varies widely in Colombia but tends to be weakest in disadvantaged areas where students are in particular need of strong pedagogical leadership and high-quality teaching; a situation that may lead to inequalities in student learning and development (OECD, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>).

There are several challenges in relation to developing the leadership skills of school principals and their team. First, in Colombia, there is no shared framework of excellent teaching and leadership. The existing competency profile provides only a very general description of the functions, knowledge requirements, leadership skills and minimum training and experience for school principals. The profile developed for the competency assessment required for promotion provides something closer to a school leadership framework but is not commonly accepted as a vision of good leadership.

Moreover, school leadership does not benefit from its own salary and career structure. During the review visit, it was noted that school principals may have lower salaries than some of the teachers in their schools (i.e. low relative salaries for the same working time). Furthermore, not all school principals are evaluated periodically – a practice that cannot only provide accountability but also help develop school leaders' pedagogical leadership (Radinger, 2014<sub>[68]</sub>). As explained above and in Chapter 4, the teaching profession in Colombia is in transition between two statutes and only school leaders having assumed a leadership role since 2002 under the new statute are evaluated by their Secretary of Education. In particular, school leaders in the older statute who make up the largest share are not evaluated by their Secretary of Education.

Finally, there are limited specific opportunities for school leaders to develop their pedagogical leadership skills. The national Let's All Learn programme (*Programa Todos a Aprender*, PTA; for further information, see Chapter 4) has developed a project to train the school principals from the schools with the lowest performance in the country (Sanchez, 2018). This new initiative is based on previous projects with four different organisations for the implementation of training programmes for school leaders – the most well-known being the Transformative School Principals programme (*Rectores Líderes Transformadores*) (OECD, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>).<sup>23</sup>

*Overall, more could be done to provide technical-pedagogical support to schools, including small school sites in rural and remote areas*

The experience of the last three decades has shown that not all Secretaries of Education have the capacity and resources to effectively support schools and school leaders in the provision of education within their territory. While there are cases such as Bogotá, Manizales and Medellín that have benefitted from increased autonomy to both expand access and improve quality, as is also highlighted in Chapter 2, there are many others – especially those with substantial rural populations and those affected by the armed conflict – that lack the resources to manage their schools effectively (OECD, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>).

The Secretaries of Education of departments are likely to face greater challenges in managing their schools, including many more rural and remote schools than those of large municipalities. For instance, during the review visit, the team travelled to the department of Chocó, where the ministry had (for a period of time) taken over the Secretary of Education given a lack of local capacity to provide education. Chocó is one of the country's poorest departments and constitutes an example of how decentralisation may contribute to deepening inequalities if certain conditions are not met.

The reality for many schools in Colombia is that they are largely left to their own devices in their efforts to provide quality education within their communities. The Secretaries of Education seem to provide schools with limited technical-pedagogical support to reflect on and improve their processes since they do not have the necessary human and financial resources to do so. Based on the information collected during the review visit, many Secretaries of Education (as well as the ministry of education) appear to have high turnover rates of staff and depend to a great extent on contractors that may not always be selected based on their competencies but rather for political or personal reasons (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

Staff from Secretaries of Education seem to prioritise visiting schools that are closer to the Secretary's office (if any), abandoning those in remote areas given the distance and time required for travel. It was also unclear how staff work with different school sites within a school cluster. At the same time, and as previously explained in this chapter, school leaders do not seem equipped to develop an effective learning environment and collaborative practices within their schools, and also between the different sites within their school cluster. This may result in inequities in the quality of education between rural and urban areas and school sites.

The ministry seems aware of this complex and difficult situation and has been taking on a greater role to provide some direct support to schools. Most importantly through the *Programa Todos a Aprender*, the ministry has worked to improve teachers' practices within the classroom. However, it is clear that more needs to be done to support capacity development not only at the school level, but also at the territorial level. While there are some forms of horizontal collaboration between territorial entities, these could be strengthened, in particular between large certified municipalities and the department within which they are located as well as Secretaries of Education more broadly. The same holds true for local networks between school clusters. While there are some examples of school networks in Colombia, there is potential to make greater use of the power of collaboration.<sup>24</sup>

### ***The organisation of teaching and learning***

*There is a tension between the autonomy for schools to develop and implement their own curricula and central steering of learning goals and objectives*

The curriculum is an important tool that specifies learning objectives and lays out the underlying values and culture that should shape teaching and learning. The curriculum is also a key reference for the development of learning resources such as textbooks and the assessment of students' learning outcomes (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). Countries take different approaches to how they design curricula and in the degree to which they set system-wide expectations to guide teaching and learning across schools. While it is common for OECD countries to have system-wide curriculum frameworks that set objectives for



student learning, the degree of prescription varies widely and the balance between autonomy and prescription often changes over time (OECD, 2013<sup>[51]</sup>; Sinnema, 2016<sup>[69]</sup>).

In Colombia, schools have considerable autonomy to define their own curriculum and study plan as part of their educational project, as long as they dedicate 80% of instruction time to fundamental subject areas. There is no nationally defined curriculum. Teachers are also typically very autonomous to make pedagogical decisions within their classroom and should implement school curricula through the development of lesson plans (*planes de aula*). Schools' curricular autonomy has been balanced with the use of central curricular and pedagogical guidelines and learning standards that should guarantee the development of students' core competencies as explained previously. However, the number of currently valid guidelines is vast: there are curriculum guidelines, basic competency standards, pedagogical guidelines and most recently, Basic Learning Rights (*Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje*, DBA). In 2017, the ministry's curriculum team counted at least 206 different documents. Among others, there are at least 10 curricular documents for mathematics, 7 for language, 8 for science, 4 for social sciences and 29 for civic education (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

This, of course, represents a challenge for schools to develop their own curricula in line with these standards, and for Secretaries of Education to provide them with support in this pursuit. It may also compromise teachers' ability and/or willingness to work to achieve the set learning standards in their classrooms, teach in line with the guidelines and develop related materials and assessments. During the review visit, various teachers mentioned making use of different standards and related materials, such as the box for *Día E*, and also showed awareness about new learning guidelines related to the DBA (*mallas de aprendizaje*). But various teachers also mentioned that guidelines were not entirely clear to them (e.g. the language was not clear and they did not know how different guidelines relate to each other). A further concern was raised: frequent updates or changes to guidelines, which sets disincentives for getting acquainted with new guidelines. Teachers also do not seem to receive sufficient training to familiarise themselves with new materials, which also holds true for the introduction of new curricular areas, such as peace education (*Cátedra de la Paz*) in 2014.

Colombia's school-based approach to the definition of curricula also has to be set within the general context of teachers' often weak capacity and concerns about teacher learning, as analysed in Chapter 4, and weak school leadership, as discussed above. Curriculum development is a complex endeavour. While a highly decentralised approach to curriculum development can encourage innovation, it comes at the risk of inequities in learning. Not all schools will have the capacity and support to design content, lesson plans and teaching to effectively enable the learning of their students (Sinnema, 2016<sup>[69]</sup>). At the same time, the potential for school-based curriculum development to balance national consistency with local diversity – an essential condition in a diverse context like Colombia – and bring the curriculum to life in ways that engage students in a particular context is not realised if schools do not have the capacity for doing so. Indeed, during the review team's visit, teachers also mentioned the need to further contextualise content with regards to their particular situation, a task they do not necessarily feel prepared to assume and for which they do not receive (sufficient) support from their Secretaries of Education.

In practice, the extent of curriculum autonomy also depends on the educational context beyond the locus of decision-making or the degree of prescription in the curriculum itself. Other elements such as evaluation, available resources and professional learning all influence curriculum autonomy (Sinnema, 2016<sup>[69]</sup>). In Colombia, other elements seem to

have turned into a “de facto” curriculum guiding the work of teachers within the classroom in the absence of concise, specific and well-designed learning standards. Such is the case of the Year 11 school leaving examination, but also for standardised assessments in earlier years. The Let’s All Learn programme has been helping teachers from participating schools in deciding what students should learn in the absence of a clear and coherent set of curricular guidelines or a national curriculum. The programme’s curriculum though also seems to be influenced by standardised assessments.

*There are challenges for the introduction of full-day schooling (Jornada Única) that need to be carefully considered and addressed*

The expansion of full-day schooling in Colombia has been one of the main initiatives of the government in office at the time of writing this report. Created in 2014, the Full-Day Schooling programme aims to strengthen basic competencies (mathematics, science and language) and reduce the exposure of vulnerable children to out-of-school risks such as crime, drugs and pregnancy. A longer school day may also be particularly beneficial for students with single parents, and address inequities with independent private schools. Traditionally, full-day schooling has been highly correlated with students’ socio-economic background, with advantaged students more likely to attend a full-day school (Bonilla, 2014<sup>[70]</sup>).

In principle, the introduction of full-day schooling entails a series of advantages as discussed in Chapter 2. While it involves a significant investment to provide the required facilities and staff to provide space and time for instruction and other activities, full-day schooling provides more opportunities for teachers and students to cover the curriculum, repeat material and engage in hands-on activities. It is also an opportunity to improve school infrastructure and complementary services such as Colombia’s School Meal Programme (*Programa de Alimentación Escolar*, PAE).

Full-day schooling is furthermore likely an improvement over the organisation of learning in multiple shifts. The operation of multiple shifts allows for a highly efficient use of school facilities. In Colombia, 53 295 public and independent private school sites offered teaching to students in 65 237 shifts (DANE, 2018<sup>[71]</sup>). However, this organisation of schools can also result in reduced teaching hours, a more stressful learning environment due to shorter breaks and more limited opportunities for remedial or enrichment classes (Bray, 2008<sup>[72]</sup>). Evidence from Eastern Europe also shows that students attending afternoon shifts received slightly lower results, possibly due to students’ and teachers’ fatigue or the limited time left for after-school study (Lusher and Yassenov, 2016<sup>[73]</sup>).

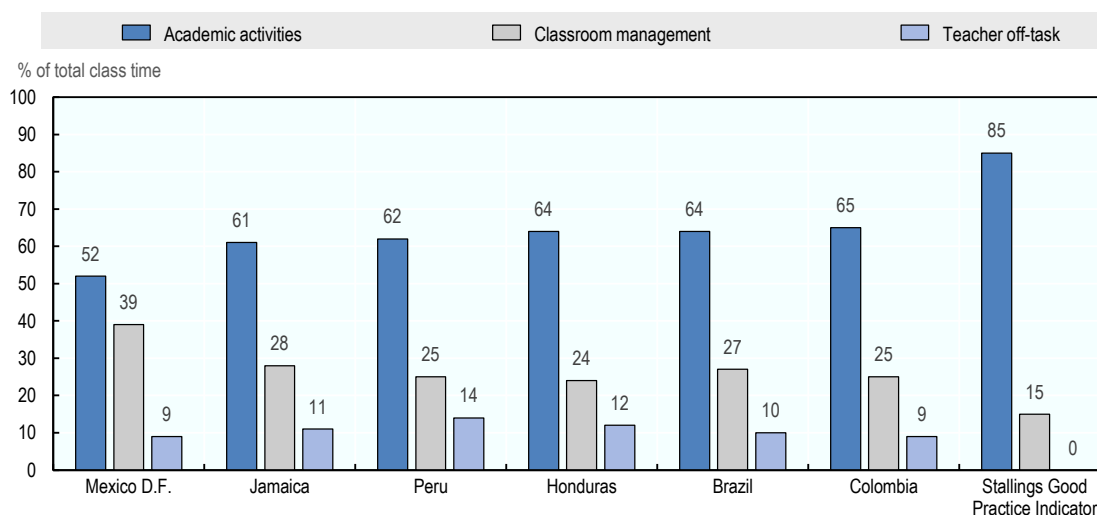
Research for Colombia shows that full-day schooling has the potential to generate important gains in terms of reduced year repetition and dropout rates (García, Fernández and Weiss, 2013<sup>[74]</sup>) and increased learning outcomes (Bonilla, 2014<sup>[70]</sup>; Hincapié, 2016<sup>[75]</sup>). The impact of attending full-day schooling is greater for mathematics than language, and greater for Year 9 than for Year 5; largest effects are found among the poorest schools and those in rural areas (Hincapié, 2016<sup>[75]</sup>). There is also evidence suggesting full-day schooling reduces teenage pregnancy in urban areas, and that more years attending a full-day school have an incremental effect on this reduction (Escobar, 2017<sup>[76]</sup>).

Despite the potential benefits of full-day schooling, there are important caveats that require careful consideration. The experience of Chile’s implementation of full-day schooling shows that there is indeed a positive effect on students’ achievement in both mathematics and language and positive externalities, such as a reduction of crime and

teenage pregnancy and higher labour market participation among women. The example of Chile, however, also demonstrates that lengthening the school day is a very expensive initiative that will only yield returns if the extra time is used effectively (Bellei, 2009<sup>[77]</sup>; Berthelon and Kruger, 2011<sup>[78]</sup>). This is consistent with the general international evidence on learning time (Gromada and Shewbridge, 2016<sup>[79]</sup>; Rivkin and Schiman, 2015<sup>[80]</sup>). Precisely in relation to the latter, previous research has raised concerns about Colombian teachers' use of their time within the classroom.

A study of classroom practices in Latin America revealed that teachers in Colombia (and in the other six participating countries) fell far short of effective instructional time. According to the study, the average time on instruction across the national sample in Colombia is 65%, which is a full 20 percentage points below the benchmark for good practice (as seen in Figure 3.6). The authors estimate this is the equivalent of one less instruction day per week. Moreover, average classroom practice varies tremendously across schools in Colombia, and an even greater range exists between the best- and worst-performing teachers inside schools (Bruns and Luque, 2015<sup>[81]</sup>).<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 3.6. Teachers' use of their time in class in selected countries in Latin America and the Caribbean**



*Notes:* The Stallings classroom observation system, also known as the Stallings classroom snapshot, is a questionnaire and protocol for timed observations that produce quantitative data about interactions of teachers and students in classrooms. Stallings observations generate data on: teachers' use of time; teachers' use of different learning activities; and teachers' ability to keep students engaged. The data presented in this figure are based on over 15 000 classrooms in more than 3 000 schools in seven different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean between 2009 and 2013. Results for the Dominican Republic are not included as the sample was a pilot. The Stallings good practice benchmark on teachers' use of instructional time in the classroom is 85% of total class time used for instruction.

Countries are ranked in ascending order of proximity to this benchmark.

Values for Brazil are pooled data from Pernambuco and Minas Gerais.

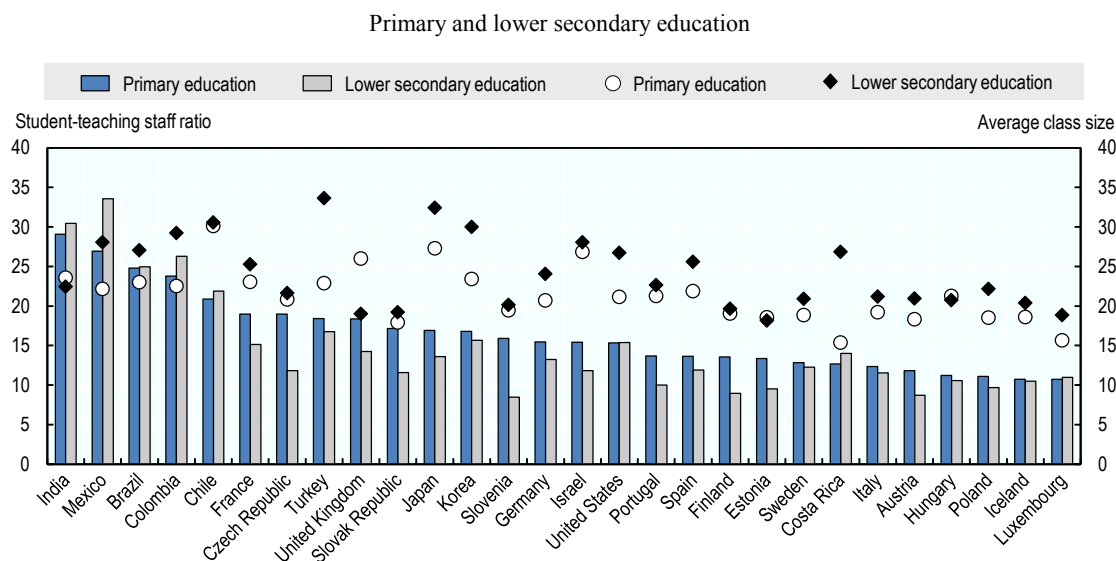
*Source:* Reproduced from Bruns, B. and J. Luque (2015), *Great Teachers: How to Raise Student Learning in Latin America and the Caribbean*, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, Washington, DC.

Teachers in Colombia spend a large amount of time on classroom management. This may be explained by the fact that, on average, Colombia has a high student-teacher ratio in

primary and secondary education (see Figure 3.7). Of course, class sizes will differ across schools and school sites and be much smaller in many rural areas. Small rural schools, however, present their own challenges for classroom management and organisation. There are no official data on multi-grade teaching in Colombia, but, based on ministry estimates, there are about 27 000 small rural school sites relying on multi-grade teaching in basic education. As the data show, these sites are largely concentrated in departments. For instance, Bogotá only has about 30 multi-grade sites, compared to about 1 800 in the neighbouring department of Cundinamarca.

There are other factors making it difficult for teachers to spend time on effective instruction. In a case study of high and low performing schools in one department of Colombia, teachers identified a variety of factors that complicate their task of focussing on effective instruction, including a lack of classroom ventilation and high temperatures, student discipline, journey to school, interruptions by parents and other activities (Villegas Mendoza, 2017<sup>[82]</sup>).

**Figure 3.7. Ratio of student to teaching staff and average class size, 2015**



*Note:* Data for France refer to public and government-dependent private institutions only. Data for Israel refer to public institutions only for upper secondary education and all secondary.

*Source:* OECD (2017), *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en>, Table D2.1. and Table D2.2.

There are at least two further concerns about the implementation of a longer school day in Colombia. First, during the review visit, it did not seem to be clear at the school level how to use the extra time – a question which seems essential given the absence of a national curriculum and considerable curricular autonomy for schools as discussed above. Instruction time in Colombia is also very high already compared to other countries, yet largely resulting from a long school year. While some school principals mentioned that additional hours should be used to strengthen core skills (in mathematics and language), teachers and also some students mentioned that longer school days should not provide more of the same but the chance to practice sports and participate in cultural activities, looking for a more comprehensive education.

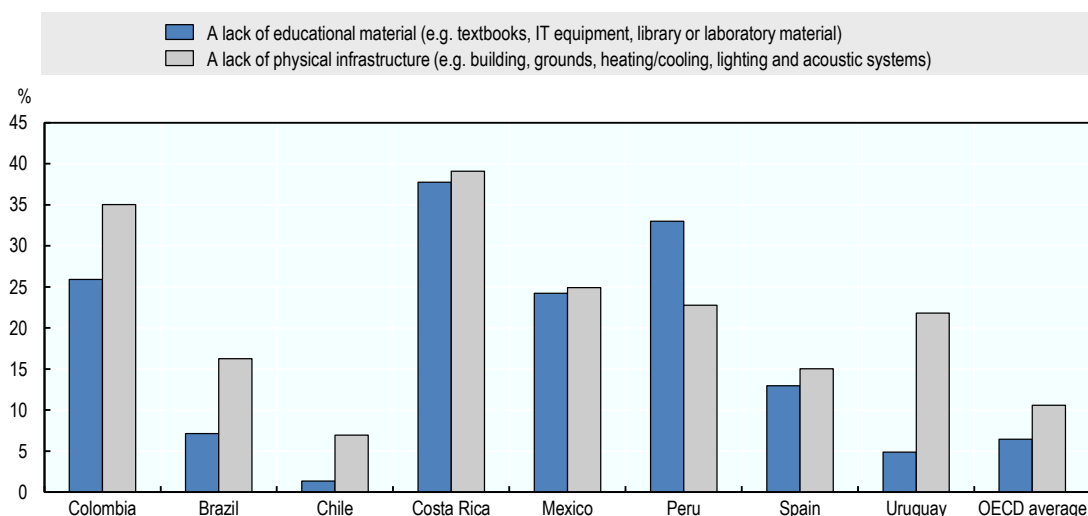
Second, the implementation of longer school days requires the effective management of teachers and their time in all school sites and adequate school leadership capacity, e.g. for scheduling teachers' time effectively. As teachers reported during the team's visit, the longer school day interfered with teachers' group activities such as learning circles (*círculos de aprendizaje*) and decreased time to exchange experiences and work alongside their peers. Teachers, who are believed to sometimes hold another job in addition to their teaching position, seem to be opposed to longer school days.

*Schools and students lack sufficient pedagogical materials and textbooks, and schools and teachers may need more guidance for selecting materials*

In Colombia, students and schools seem to face a severe shortage of educational materials and a lack of adequate infrastructure, also related to the distribution of funding analysed in Chapter 2. According to data from the OECD PISA 2015, 1 out of 4 15-year-olds attends a school in which a lack of educational materials hinders effective instruction as reported by school principals; 1 out of 3 goes to a school where the lack of physical infrastructure hinders instruction (see Figure 3.8). Principals' concerns about these limitations are considerably higher in Colombia when compared to the OECD average or other Latin American countries such as Brazil and Chile (OECD, 2016<sub>[2]</sub>).

**Figure 3.8. Lack of material resources, PISA 2015**

Results based on school principals' reports

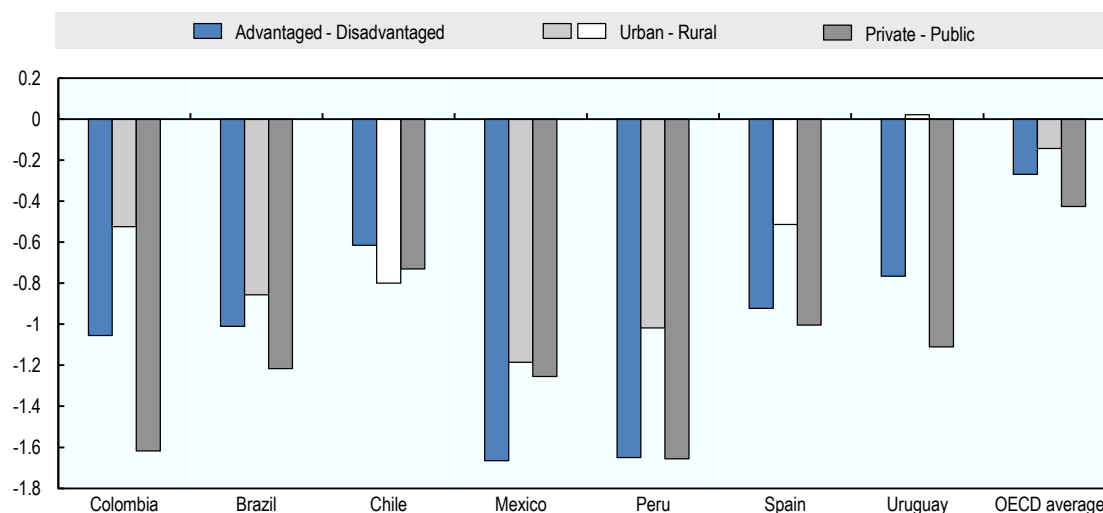


Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>, Table II.6.1.

Looking at differences between schools within Colombia, concerns about a shortage of educational materials are greater in rural than in urban schools, and even more so when comparing advantaged with disadvantaged and public with private schools (independent and government-dependent) (see Figure 3.9) (OECD, 2016<sub>[2]</sub>). This is of particular concern given indications that the availability of basic infrastructure and public services (water, electricity, sewage), didactic facilities (sport installations, labs, libraries) as well as the number of books in a school library and computers in the school have an effect on the achievement of primary education students in the region (Murillo and Román, 2011<sub>[83]</sub>).

**Figure 3.9. Shortage of material resources by school characteristics, PISA 2015**

Results based on school principals' reports



*Notes:* The figure shows the difference in the index of the shortage of material resources between different types of schools. The definition of advantaged and disadvantaged schools is based on the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status. Rural schools refer to those in communities with fewer than 3 000 people, urban schools to those located in any city with more than 100 000 people. Public schools are those managed by a public education authority, government agency, or governing board appointed by a government or elected by public franchise. Private schools refer to schools managed directly or indirectly by a non-government organisation.

Statistically significant values are marked in a darker tone.

*Source:* OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>, Table II.6.2.

The lack of textbooks and other materials is related to the process of decentralising education. Once schools were given autonomy over curricular matters, schools also assumed responsibility for acquiring educational materials that suit their project and pedagogical approach using resources from their school budget. Nevertheless, schools typically do not have enough funds to buy materials, also resulting in costs for parents. The lack of a national textbook policy and curriculum may also lead to the use of inadequate or outdated materials, especially in rural areas (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>; Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

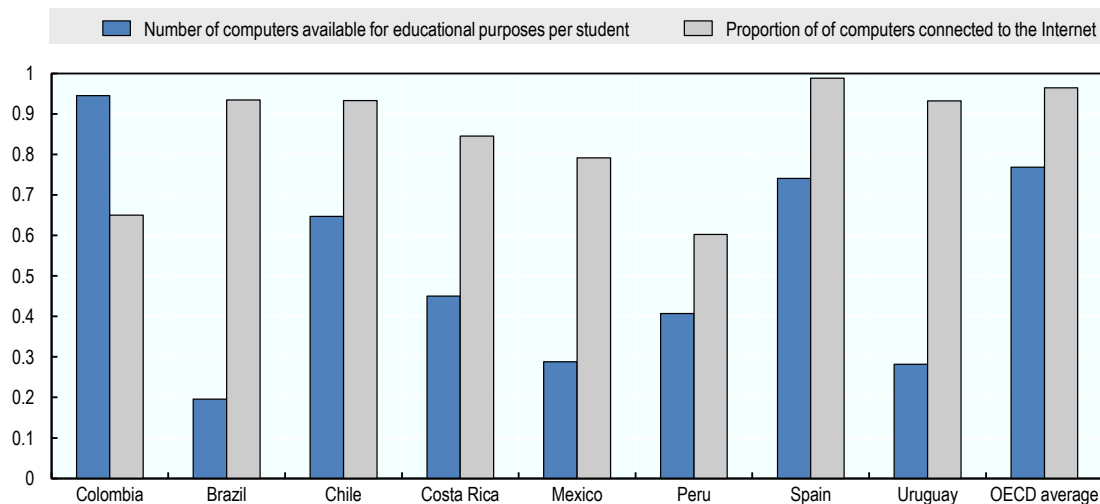
Recent initiatives have sought to steer the selection and use of textbooks through *Colombia Compra Eficiente*, a government entity with a virtual platform for schools or Secretaries of Education to buy textbooks aligned with curricular guidelines at a cheaper price thanks to aggregated demand. The ministry has also increasingly provided materials to schools as part of large-scale programmes such as Let's All Learn, but more work is needed to guarantee students' and teachers' access to good quality education materials.

In the past decades, Colombia has invested significantly in increasing students' and schools' access to ICT, most importantly with the *Computadores para Educar* programme. The programme not only provides schools with access to ICT but also teachers and school principals with training on how to incorporate digital learning into their pedagogical work. The programme seems to have achieved providing most schools and students with access to computers. According to data from the OECD PISA 2015, Colombia has the highest computer-student ratio (close to 1) among participating

countries, above the ratio of other Latin American countries participating in the study and also above the OECD average (see Figure 3.10). The international literature has established that using computers as a resource for teaching can amplify good teaching, enhance student motivation and, in some instances, academic performance, but that this crucially depends on the effective use of these resources as a complement for teachers' work and not as a substitute for it (Linden, 2008<sup>[84]</sup>; OECD, 2015<sup>[85]</sup>).

**Figure 3.10. Computers at school, PISA 2015**

Results based on school principals' reports



Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>, Table II.6.4.

Impact evaluations of Colombia's programme similarly suggest that it has the potential to positively influence students' outcomes: reducing drop-out rates, improving students' results in standardised assessments and increasing access to tertiary education (Rodríguez, Sánchez and Márquez Zuñiga, 2011<sup>[86]</sup>), but that there are certain conditions that have to be met for these positive outcomes to be realised. The two most important requirements are time and teacher learning. It takes time for the programme to start showing results on students' outcomes and teachers have to be adequately trained in incorporating ICT resources into their pedagogical work (Barrera-Osorio and Linden, 2009<sup>[87]</sup>). Teacher learning in Colombia is however relatively weak, as analysed in Chapter 4, raising some concerns about the cost-effectiveness of investments into ICT.

Access to the Internet is equally important, which could also facilitate new forms of distance learning to ensure a broad curricular offer in rural and remote areas in the long run (Sipple and Brent, 2015<sup>[88]</sup>). Although Colombia has the highest computer-student ratio, the proportion of computers connected to the Internet (approximately 6 out of 10 computers are connected) is considerably lower than the OECD average where practically every computer has Internet access. There are also large differences between rural and urban areas in Colombia (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>). Colombia's difficulties are related to challenges in co-ordination between authorities from different sectors for the provision of equipment, electricity and broadband access, and difficulties and costs for providing ICT in remote, rural areas due to geography. For instance, a school may have computers, but not sufficient electricity or connectivity (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

*Strategies for vulnerable students or those with special needs are limited, and inclusion policies have so far paid little attention to the needs of rural contexts*

In the past decades, Colombia has considerably expanded access to education. However, there are still challenges ahead not only in raising overall enrolment rates and ensuring transitions, but also in reducing inequities for disadvantaged students, such as children from low socio-economic backgrounds, rural students, ethnic minorities, students affected by the conflict and children with special needs. The arrival of migrants and refugees from Venezuela raises additional challenges for schools for an unforeseeable future.

The General Education Law recognises the rights of vulnerable students, and flexible education models provide pedagogical strategies to address their learning needs as analysed above. The ministry together with Secretaries of Education have also implemented some strategies to ensure children and young people enrol and stay in schools, such as the initiative *Escuela Busca Niño* (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). Colombia's Institute of Family Welfare, the ICBF, provides additional programmes and strategies that target other risk factors such as child labour, teenage pregnancy and recruitment into armed groups. But there seems to be considerable scope for the ministry, Secretaries of Education and schools to develop further strategies to address disadvantage.

Concerning the ministry and Secretaries of Education, only limited attention seems to be paid to monitoring the outcomes of student groups at risk of low performance and dropping out and to setting targets or benchmarks to reduce the impact of students' background on their learning. For instance, while various valuable measures are available to target interventions at schools and students in a challenging context or with low performance, such as school's strata (*estrato*), a geographical classification according to a neighbourhood's socio-economic characteristics, or the school's performance index ISCE, it was unclear how these measures are being used. The goals stipulated in the last National Development Plan did not include any equity-related targets, objectives and monitoring that could steer objectives at the level of the Secretaries of Education.

Also, within schools, the available resources and strategies are lacking and there do not seem to be sufficient processes for monitoring students at risk nor is there a clear protocol establishing what to do once a student at risk is identified. This is likely a particular challenge for rural schools which may lack additional resources both in the school and their community. Class sizes and student-teacher ratios, on average, are very high at all levels of education compared to other countries and only comparable to a few countries in the region like Brazil and Mexico (OECD, 2017<sup>[16]</sup>). While class sizes will be much smaller in small rural school sites as analysed above, schools with large classes make it difficult for teachers to individualise learning. This is a particular challenge given the serious shortage of support staff, such as counsellors, psychologists or social workers.

Data from the OECD PISA 2015 show that Colombian principals are in fact the third most concerned about the lack of assisting staff in their schools among all participating countries, and these concerns are even greater in disadvantaged schools (OECD, 2016<sup>[2]</sup>). Colombia's post-conflict context is likely to exacerbate the need for support staff such as psychologists and social workers, to support teachers in their work and provide socio-emotional support for students within schools (Harker, Molano and Cristancho, 2017<sup>[89]</sup>). Teachers lack sufficient preparation and opportunities to develop their competencies to address the wide range of learning needs of their students, as discussed in Chapter 4, and year repetition rates - a costly but often ineffective practice - remain very high (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[20]</sup>; OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). In fact, the failure of a recent attempt to decrease



repetition through a policy of automatic year promotion highlights the need for further strategies to support students at risk of low performance (Pinzón Hernández, 2018<sub>[90]</sub>).

Moreover, school violence remains a considerable problem in Colombia (OECD, 2016<sub>[2]</sub>), even though the national government and civil society have implemented interesting initiatives such as a national system for school coexistence and the Classrooms in Peace programme (Chaux et al., 2017<sub>[91]</sub>).<sup>26</sup> Between 2012 and 2014, more than 60% of students in Year 5 declared having witnessed violence and around 20% identified themselves as an aggressor as part of the context questionnaire for standardised assessments in citizenship (Sánchez, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>). School bullying and violence is a complex problem. Nevertheless, school counsellors (*orientadores*) whose primary role is to develop strategies that promote a positive school climate and peaceful coexistence inside and outside of school are in short supply and not adequately prepared.

Finally, equally important is the attention given to students with special educational needs within schools. Only 1% of students in upper secondary education have a disability, suggesting that many special needs students do not reach the end of compulsory education (García et al., 2016<sub>[21]</sub>). Colombia has recently introduced legislation for the inclusion of special needs children. In accordance with Decree 1421 of 2017, every school must accept students with special needs and make reasonable pedagogical and organisational adjustments. This policy is in fact aligned with a growing body of research suggesting that students with special needs could be better served in mainstream schools with the assistance of specialists and that the exchange between students with and without special needs within the same learning environment entails benefits for both (OECD, forthcoming<sub>[20]</sub>).

Many schools in Colombia, however, lack the infrastructure, trained teachers and specialists needed to create a truly inclusive learning environment. As Beltran Villamizar et al. (2015<sub>[92]</sub>) indicate, laws are in place for children with special needs to enter schools, but the conditions to guarantee they stay in schools are not. According to these authors, the two most critical conditions are curricular adaptations that respond to and meet the requirements of students with special needs and an adequate physical environment.

Although some guidelines have been developed to better support children with special needs and despite the fact that the ministry allocates additional funding for schools to co-finance the cost of providing education to students with disabilities, there is no detailed plan for the implementation of inclusive education. Moreover, Secretaries of Education and schools often seem to be opposed to inclusion (Sánchez, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>). The inclusion policy has furthermore failed to consider the needs of rural schools which will face greater difficulties in providing special needs students with an inclusive learning environment (e.g. due to a lack of other support services).

*The concept of school evaluation is extremely narrow and risks having unintended side-effects on teaching and learning*

It can be argued that a comprehensive vision of school evaluation entails at least three different approaches: i) school self-evaluation, conducted by members of the school to assess the effectiveness of structures and processes in place and the quality of student learning outcomes; ii) external school evaluation, conducted by an external body to assess the quality of structures and processes operating within a school and the quality of student learning outcomes, mainly as an accountability measure but also as an opportunity to give feedback for school development; and iii) the comparison of schools with different

performance measures, which aims to benchmark their performance in relation to other schools, regions or the national average (OECD, 2013<sup>[51]</sup>).

In the past two decades, Colombia seems to have focused mainly on the third aspect, consolidating standardised assessments as the cornerstone of the country's school evaluation system. The *Pruebas Saber* have been fundamental in shifting the focus towards students' learning outcomes and have the potential to inform improvement process within both schools and the education system in general, as highlighted above, but there are challenges ahead regarding the development of a more comprehensive and balanced approach to school evaluation (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>).

While education in Colombia pursues a broad set of learning goals and objectives for all-rounded student development as emphasised in the country's Constitution and General Education Law, standardised assessments focus efforts at all levels of the system on a narrow set of learning outcomes in the form of cognitive skills as measured by the *Pruebas Saber*. Such a strong focus on cognitive skills measured by standardised assessments may also detract attention from students' development of other competencies and non-cognitive skills, which contribute both to students' academic learning and broader development as well as the creation of productive, equitable and socially-cohesive societies (Heckman and Kautz, 2012<sup>[93]</sup>; Levin, 2012<sup>[94]</sup>) and are also valued by employers in Colombia (Ritterbusch et al., 2016<sup>[95]</sup>).

While the results of the *Pruebas Saber* should predominantly be a valuable resource to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement, results seem to often take on the ultimate objective of teaching and learning itself. During the review visit, the team could observe that not only school leaders and teachers, but also students, are extremely aware of the assessments and the intensive preparation for them in order for their school to obtain good results both in the tests and the performance index ISCE. This is particularly the case for examinations in Year 11 which are used to rank schools by the public, but also seems to be the case for assessments in earlier years. Such is the importance of succeeding in the standardised examinations that students and their families, but also Secretaries of Education with sufficient resources, pay for taking mock tests that familiarise them with the examination and help them achieve better results, as was observed during the review visit.

This focus on a narrow set of skills has recently been reinforced by specific targets adopted as part of the country's National Development Plan to become the most educated country of the region by 2025 as measured by the OECD PISA assessments. This objective has been linked with individual school improvement goals, public accountability and financial incentives in the form of the performance index ISCE. While this promotes a common goal for improvement, it is not embedded within a broader vision for the Colombian school system and also puts an additional focus on performance in standardised assessments. As Table 3.6 demonstrates, schools already used assessments extensively to compare themselves even prior to setting ISCE targets.

There are also concerns about the design of the performance index which does not take schools' socio-economic context and value-added into account, which penalises disadvantaged schools doing well given challenging circumstances. Also, the efficiency element of the index related to the proportion of students passing a school year is an absolute measure that penalises schools already doing well but that cannot improve further. There is also a lack of transparency of the financial bonuses related to the index, both for schools and school leadership through a separate management indicator.

**Table 3.6. Use of standardised assessments, PISA 2015**

Percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that standardised tests are used to:

	Guide students' learning	Inform parents about their child's progress	Monitor the school's progress from year to year	Identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved	Compare the school with other schools	Compare the school to district or national performance
<b>Colombia</b>	<b>80.8</b>	<b>64.4</b>	<b>87.8</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>76.0</b>	<b>80.7</b>
Brazil	80.3	68.8	86.5	93.3	66.1	84.2
Chile	82.3	73.0	87.5	82.2	52.1	59.7
Costa Rica	20.0	14.1	28.2	27.2	24.2	32.7
Mexico	79.2	66.6	88.7	75.3	80.7	87.3
Peru	69.4	58.2	71.3	71.9	54.7	62.2
Spain	37.7	37.9	41.5	46.4	38.4	46.7
Uruguay	35.1	28.3	34.8	39.1	21.1	23.5
<b>OECD average</b>	<b>62.5</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>69.4</b>	<b>58.9</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>68.2</b>

Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>, Table II.4.24.

One of the main risks with a focus on standardised assessments, the generation of rankings and the publication of results, is what the literature calls “teaching to the test”, which implies actions such as reducing the curriculum, concentrating on the assessed subject matters, focussing more efforts on the years that are tested, or modifying the internal student assessment instruments to resemble those used in standardised tests (Koretz, 2008<sup>[96]</sup>; OECD, 2013<sup>[51]</sup>). In this context, it is important to note that there appears to be also some lack of alignment in Colombia between the education system’s broad goals for student learning and relatively narrow measurements of learning. While citizenship or science are assessed periodically as part of the assessments in Years 3, 5 and 9, there seems to be scope to expand the breadth of subjects and methods to communicate a focus on broader competencies.

At present, external standardised assessments are also not being fully used to promote improvement processes within schools. Initiatives such as *Día E* where the school community gets together to analyse their school performance index ISCE are implemented in most schools throughout the country. Nevertheless, schools often lack the capacity to use their results in the assessment to foster improvement processes or to change pedagogical practices in the classroom. School self-evaluation and development planning are indeed encouraged as a regular practice in the Colombian school system. One of the main limitations of schools’ improvement plans – as observed during the review visit – however, is that they also seem to be predominantly focused on student learning outcomes, without giving the necessary attention to analysing school processes.

Once again, these challenges are also related to weak school leadership within schools, essentially focused on administrative and financial aspects and without sound capacity to provide teachers with guidance and support on how to transform results into adjustment or change of their pedagogical practices, as well as a lack of technical-pedagogical support from the Secretaries of Education.

## Policy recommendations

### *School network*

*Encourage the review of school networks to ensure equitable access to high-quality teaching and learning and the effective management of school clusters, especially in rural areas*

School clusters entail a series of potential benefits such as promoting smoother transitions between levels, reducing students' risk for school leaving and providing students in rural remote communities with access to more school resources. However, if not carefully planned and implemented, school clusters may lead to inequalities in the provision of education as previously explained.

Even though differences in local school networks are likely also explained by topography, the number of sites per school varies considerably at present with some schools having more than 20 sites while others only having 1 or 2. The central level should, therefore, encourage Secretaries of Education to play a more effective role for managing their school networks together with school communities as part of their coverage plans (*Plan de Cobertura*), a tool for managing educational provision. Departments should also be encouraged to collaborate with the certified municipalities located in their territory. The expansion of pre-primary and upper secondary education, the introduction of longer school days and internal migration and demographic changes, heighten the urgency of this task, but also provide an opportunity to rethink local school networks.

Reorganisation processes should not, in principle, entail closing sites with a very low number of students (since these sites are probably the ones that provide children in remote rural areas with access to education) but mostly aim to increase the number of main schools, thereby improving the operation of school clusters. The goal should be to establish school clusters with an adequate number of sites per main school that provide high-quality conditions for learning. During the review visit, the team observed school clusters with sites that were as large as the main school. Secretaries of Education could enhance such sites to become main school sites, so the total number of sites in the cluster can be divided between the two main schools (or more if necessary). Reducing the number of sites per cluster may also ease school principals' administrative work, increasing their time for pedagogical leadership (e.g. for observing teachers in classrooms, for establishing strong partnerships with parents and the community). Where the small size of school sites compromises the quality of education, Secretaries of Education could carefully consider the closure of such sites together with the school community, but only if transport or boarding arrangements allow (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[20]</sup>).

Reorganisation efforts should, in general, consider the geographical distance as well as the ease of transport between the sites and the main school. Some of the potential benefits of having school clusters are only realised in as long as students (and teachers) from remote sites are able to reach the main school to have access to a library, sports facilities or computer lab, for instance. The number of sites per cluster and the distance between sites must also be taken into account for the appointment of co-ordinators, whereas only the number of students is currently considered. It is important to guarantee that all sites have regular access to a co-ordinator who can provide technical-pedagogical assistance to the teacher or teachers working in each site. Steps to improve school leadership as proposed below will be essential to take advantage of the benefits of school clusters

(e.g. allocating teachers across sites within the same school day, creating learning communities for teachers in small school sites, etc.).

Finally, the design of school networks also needs to carefully consider the planning of transport and boarding arrangements for students, but also teachers. Transport and boarding are essential in remote rural areas, to guarantee students' access to school and transition between sites and levels of education. Increasing the available funding to cover costs for transport and infrastructure investments and maintenance as discussed in Chapter 2 will be essential in providing Secretaries of Education with the necessary resources. Adequate transport arrangements are important as travel time impacts students' well-being and learning (e.g. by causing fatigue or difficulties to concentrate in class or reducing time spent with parents) and transitions to higher levels of education, especially for disadvantaged students and those expecting lower returns from education (OECD, forthcoming<sub>[20]</sub>). A study on the effects of geographical constraints on upper secondary participation and completion in Norway found longer travel times to the nearest school to have a modest negative effect on the probability of graduation, for example (Falch, Lujala and Strøm, 2013<sub>[97]</sub>).

Regulating boarding schools is equally important. The educational experience of boarders differs markedly from students living at home; they spend considerably more time in the school environment and among school staff, have different opportunities for growth and development and often follow highly regulated daily routines (Martin et al., 2014<sub>[98]</sub>). Empirical research on boarding schools specifically addressing the needs of rural and remote areas is limited but, considering some students' reliance on their services to access secondary schools, it is important to establish standards and guidelines ensuring the quality of their provision, including pastoral and academic care, facilities and resources, the provision of extracurricular activities, staff training and qualifications, and boarding students' rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, it is necessary to improve the information systems on boarding schools, starting with a complete database of all the boarding schools currently operating in Colombia (at present, information on the total number of boarding schools is not clear in SIMAT).

*Improve the regulation and quality assurance of contracted private schools, and develop multi-sector strategies to address the risk of segregation*

Public-private partnerships will continue to be a strategic component for the provision of school education in Colombia, a challenging context with high rates of internal migration and displacement due to the country's conflict. But it is necessary to ensure that these alternatives are of quality. This becomes even more critical when recognising that these mechanisms are being increasingly used to provide education for indigenous students and students with different types of vulnerability, and that it has been more challenging to replace publicly-funded private providers in rural areas with public provision.

The effective quality assurance of contracted private schools will also depend on the general capacity and resources of Secretaries of Education. The creation of a national quality agency which takes on responsibility for evaluating school processes as proposed below, however, could also help ensure the quality of private providers for school places that cannot be provided in the public system due to capacity constraints. Strengthening regulations (e.g. on the assignment of students to contracted schools and the monitoring of school processes) and maintaining regulations that are already in place, is another area that the ministry should consider. The prohibition of tuition fees in contracted schools is important to avoid inequities, for instance (OECD, 2017<sub>[7]</sub>).

Improving contract arrangements for private providers should be a further priority. It is essential that the terms of these agreements are able to be extended beyond one year, so that commitments for improvement, innovations and institutional learning can be included in the contracts. Longer contracts would allow private providers to ensure greater regularity, to plan for the medium term and to offer better conditions to the staff in charge of providing education. The contracting of private providers also has a potential for innovation and the ministry should contribute to replicating best practices.

Colombia should furthermore consider developing a multi-sector approach to address segregation between public and private schools, particularly those without public funding charging high fees. According to data provided by the ministry, enrolment in independent private schools has in fact been increasing in recent years, from a share of 14.2% of enrolment in 2010 to 17.0% in 2017,<sup>27</sup> and particularly so in primary education. Since the factors that contribute to segregation are context-dependent, the ministry (together with other relevant ministries and departments) should investigate them carefully before rigorously piloting and rolling out an appropriate combination of measures across policy domains including education, transport and housing. Initiatives aimed at narrowing the gap between high-performing and low-performing schools could be effective in raising the quality of the most disadvantaged schools while preventing the exodus of advantaged families from under-performing schools to the private sector.

### *School governance*

#### *Professionalise school leadership*

School leadership requires a great deal of attention at all levels. In the past decades, Colombia has granted schools considerable curricular and pedagogical autonomy without investing sufficiently in building a strong teaching profession and even less so sufficient leadership capacity in schools that can make the most of their autonomy. Schools have the freedom to create their own pedagogical projects together with their community but need the leadership to guide this process. Key recommendations on the development of the teaching profession proposed in Chapter 4 around a new vision of teacher professionalism also depend significantly on greater pedagogical leadership, as does the effective running of school clusters which may include small rural remote sites.

The age profile of current school leaders (nearly 40% are between 55 and 64 years old) provides an opportunity to improve school leadership in Colombia with new principals that may enter the profession with different preparation, training and support. The following recommendations may contribute to making the school leadership profession more attractive overall. A central institution providing continuity and capacity for teacher learning as proposed in Chapter 4 could fulfil a similar role for school leadership and guide the development of a comprehensive school leadership strategy.

First, establishing a set of competency standards for school leaders that are commonly accepted would provide a clear reference point for the further development of school leaders. Competency profiles developed by civil society, such as the *Fundación Empresarios por la Educación* for its school leadership development programme or for the competency assessment to determine school leaders' progression in the salary scale provide a good basis but need to be communicated more clearly.

Furthermore, the development of a distinct career structure with its own salary scale that guarantees adequate levels of remuneration clearly higher than those of teachers –

reflecting school principals' level of responsibility – may also contribute to increasing the status of the profession (OECD, 2013<sup>[51]</sup>; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008<sup>[62]</sup>). Reflections around this should be embedded within reflections about the future of the teaching profession discussed in Chapter 4 given that new school leaders replacing retiring school leaders are being recruited under the new teacher statute with its approach to competence-based career progression.

It is also necessary to provide school leaders with opportunities to improve their skills to lead schools' pedagogical work. The Let's All Learn programme has been working in that direction but further work is still needed. The training of school leaders should focus on competencies in areas that ultimately improve teaching and learning, such as strategies for supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality; goal setting, assessment and accountability; financial and human resource management; and system leadership (Augustine et al., 2009<sup>[65]</sup>). As emerging research suggests, school leaders should also gain an understanding of how to create learning environments that combine a strong focus on academic achievement with caring support, safety and belonging for students to foster academic engagement (Louis, Murphy and Smylie, 2016<sup>[99]</sup>).

Particularly in the Colombian context, it is fundamental that training helps school leaders to develop their skills for implementing self-evaluation and school improvement planning. At present, these school improvement processes are expected to be in place in schools but there are some concerns about schools' capacity to actually make the most of this process. Developing school leaders' knowledge and skills for the effective scheduling of their teachers' time should be another priority given plans to implement a full school day in all public schools. Other complementary measures such as reducing principals' administrative and financial workload through hiring more managerial staff and/or reducing the number of sites in the cluster, would also contribute to strengthening their pedagogical leadership by giving them more time to provide teachers with pedagogical support, including teachers in rural school sites.

Additionally, regardless of their statute, it would be desirable that all school leaders in Colombia have access to formative performance appraisal and ongoing support from their Secretaries of Education. This would be an opportunity to establish a shared educational vision, to set clear expectations for school principals' role, to provide them with formative feedback and ultimately to hold them accountable for their work. Receiving formative assessments themselves would probably improve school principals' skills to assess teachers and provide them with feedback. This of course, also implies that the Secretaries of Education need to receive further training on how to conduct such evaluations and provide their schools with adequate support (OECD, 2013<sup>[51]</sup>).

The ministry, together with the National Civil Service Commission and ICFES, need to pay particular attention to the selection of new school leaders to make sure this is a competitive process that attracts highly qualified professionals. A potential measure to make the school leadership profession more competitive could be to limit the appointment as school principal to a certain number of years. This measure should, however, be closely monitored for impact on attractiveness so it does not lead to greater stress for an already challenging role.

Finally, the ministry and Secretaries of Education should draw on and further encourage one of the strengths of Colombia's schools – a distributed vision of school leadership and teacher leadership as discussed in Chapter 4. School principals not only work together with their co-ordinators but also school counsellors (e.g. in the design of school community strategies) and teachers (e.g. through the directive and academic councils).

Co-ordinators are currently appointed by the Secretary of Education but it may be interesting to explore the possibility of giving principals greater autonomy in appointing their own leadership team. In any case, the other members of the leadership team should also receive training to strengthen their skills for technical-pedagogical support.

*Strengthen technical-pedagogical support and advice for schools leveraging the potential of networks, in particular for pedagogical staff in small rural schools*

The capacity for Secretaries of Education to provide greater technical pedagogical support for schools in challenging contexts such as rural and remote or post-conflict areas will depend in large part on a more equitable distribution of financial resources as discussed in Chapter 2. Policies that are sustained in the long run – for instance in the framework of the country’s ten-year education plan or through efforts to re-establish education boards at all levels as proposed in Chapter 2 cannot be stressed enough to create a more supportive environment for schools. This also includes more sustainability and greater synergies between different initiatives at a local level, including civil society. Networks also have a strong potential to build capacity through peer learning, collaboration and resource sharing. They can promote the identification and dissemination of good practices that may contribute to improving teaching and learning more broadly across the school system.

At the school level, the ministry, as well as Secretaries of Education, should encourage more systematic networks, for small rural schools in particular but also more generally. In rural areas, higher teaching schools (*Escuelas Normales Superiores*), providing initial teacher education for pre-primary and primary levels, could take on a key role in building the capacity of other schools and in leading larger school networks. Both local practices in Colombia, as well as examples worldwide, can provide inspiration. Perhaps one of the most relevant examples for rural schools in Colombian is Chile’s rural micro-centres (*microcentros rurales*). New Zealand’s Learning and Change Networks also provide an example more broadly relevant for all schools (see Box 3.2).

Specifically, in the case of rural schools, implementing successful school networks requires first a deep understanding and reflection on the differences between rural schools, with the needs of remote sites in particular, which are more likely to experience challenges in providing the same educational opportunities as rural schools located in the urban periphery. Moreover, the ministry and Secretaries of Education need to pay attention to what many stakeholders interviewed during the review visit referred to as “the new rurality” (*la nueva ruralidad*) in the context of the peace process.

The success of networks in overcoming capacity and resource constraints resulting from their location and size depends on a number of factors. Distance and the time it takes to travel between school sites as well as a lack of a common understanding among the school communities for the need to collaborate can act as barriers. Trust and collaborative working relations between schools, clear goals, mutual benefits and actionable results emerging from working together, on the other hand, can facilitate successful collaboration among rural schools (Muijs, 2015<sup>[100]</sup>).

Lastly, networks can also be implemented at the level of territorial entities which would build on strong capacity and innovation that exist in some Secretaries of Education (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>). In this regard, the ministry, but also associations of departments and municipalities should play a stronger role in facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange across authorities.



### Box 3.2. Networks for schools and teachers

#### Rural School Networks in Chile (*microcentros rurales*)

Since 1992, the Programme of Basic Rural Education (*Programa de Educación Básica Rural*) has provided technical-pedagogical support to small schools in rural areas. This initiative, which comprises a number of actions from adaptations of the curriculum to teacher professional development, has also established rural school networks (*microcentros rurales*) that provide a space for different multi-grade schools and their staff within the same area to come together and reflect about their work. School networks seek to address the particular needs of multi-grade schools and the challenges they face (e.g. cultural, social and ethnic diversity of students, teaching of students of different ages in the same classroom, personal and professional isolation of staff, weak links between schools and other institutions, including the Ministry of Education and providers). By law, school networks meet for two hours on a weekly basis in technical meetings to evaluate teaching and learning in schools, reflect about teachers' pedagogical work and necessary changes and innovative approaches to improve student outcomes, exchange pedagogical experiences, plan classroom teaching strategies and agree criteria for the development of school improvement plans. When necessary, school networks receive support from the technical-pedagogical advisory services of the Ministry of Education or independent advisory services. The co-ordinators of the individual rural school networks meet on an annual basis for two days to receive training, support and information on the ministry's initiatives and policies. While rural school networks face challenges to focus sufficiently on pedagogical strategies instead of administrative issues, they provide a promising platform for collaboration.

Source: Santiago, P. et al. (2017), *OECD Reviews of School Resources: Chile*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264285637-en>.

#### New Zealand's Learning and Change Networks

New Zealand has initiated Learning and Change Networks to accelerate student achievement in Years 1 to 8 and to address equity issues through the power of collaboration. Networks involve schools, families, teachers, leaders, communities, professional providers and the education ministry. Learning and Change Networks address three big agenda items – schooling improvement, blended learning and digital technologies, and cultural responsiveness – holistically instead of creating projects that deal with those agendas separately. Design work on the strategy commenced in October 2011 and five pilot networks representing 55 schools were established. The strategy went live in October 2012 with 57 networks established involving 373 schools (approximately 15% of New Zealand schools), with an average of 6 to 7 schools per network. There is a particular focus on priority groups traditionally under-served by the system – Māori, Pasifika, those from lower socio-economic groups, and those with special educational needs – along with their families, teachers, school and community leaders. A central role is given to evaluation, generating learning evidence at school, network, regional and system levels and a strong connection to international experience and networks. Learning and Change Networks also recognise the importance of engaging learners, their parents, families and communities in powerful learning-focused partnerships.

Source: OECD (2015), *Schooling Redesign: Towards Innovative Learning Systems*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264245914-en>.

The ministry could also play a stronger role in directly building the technical capacity of Secretaries of Education. In Denmark, for example, the ministry responsible for education has created a group of learning consultants that advise local authorities in their improvement efforts. Consultants come mostly from local authorities and schools and return to their job after a period of time advising others (for further details, see Nusche et al. (2016<sub>[101]</sub>)).

### ***The organisation of teaching and learning***

#### *Initiate a long-term participatory process to develop a national curriculum framework and further support schools to develop their pedagogical projects*

Schools' curricular autonomy in Colombia has been balanced with the use of central learning standards and curricular guidelines that should guarantee the development of students' core competencies. As explained previously, however, efforts to establish common learning goals over the last three decades have resulted in a vast number of learning standards and curricular guidelines. Also, in terms of content, teachers reported difficulties in understanding standards and guidelines and identifying clear learning goals. While some level of curricular autonomy provides room for teachers' professional judgements and innovations in the classroom, it is important that goals to be achieved by students are clear so that teachers can teach towards standards, assess learning against them and adapt their teaching (OECD, 2013<sub>[51]</sub>).

During the review visit, the team learned that the ministry had initiated a review of existing curricular guidelines, clearly aware that there are too many of them and that is not clear how they relate to each other. These efforts to review the existing standards and guidelines in order to establish a more concise and clear version should be maintained and strengthened in the short term. At the same time, Colombia should consider the possibility of starting a longer process of developing a more comprehensive national curriculum framework (OECD, 2016<sub>[14]</sub>).

The question of curriculum autonomy is not a normative but a contextual one. As such, other elements, including a country's accountability framework, students' achievement in terms of quality and equity, and the capacity of teachers and school leaders should be considered. Attention and dialogue about all factors that influence the curriculum would help make sure that a curriculum is suitable for a given context at a given time (Sinnema, 2016<sub>[69]</sub>). Countries must find their own balance between local autonomy and central prescription. In the Colombian context, arguably, more weight should be given to greater prescription given strong accountability in the form of standardised assessments, inequities and low levels of student achievement and weak local capacity.

The elaboration of a national curriculum framework – which should be planned over a sufficient timeframe – should be a participatory process, involving broad consultation with several key stakeholders, particularly teachers. This would contribute to ensure ownership and ensure that the framework reflects the full range of knowledge, skills and values that all citizens deem to be important. In Scotland, a reform of the curriculum at the beginning of the new century was led by a board made up of local authority representatives, teacher and school leader associations, national authorities, parent representatives, and colleges and universities (OECD, 2015<sub>[85]</sub>). In Ireland, a National Council for Curriculum and Assessment brings together representatives from education, industry, trade unions, parents and others, and provides advice on curriculum and assessment. While not responsible for implementing curriculum change, the council provides support materials and works with practitioners and teachers (OECD, 2013<sub>[51]</sub>).

In Colombia, the national education board (JUNE) and its technical secretariat, which should be re-established as suggested above and in Chapter 2, would provide a starting point for discussing curriculum reform.

The process towards developing a common curriculum framework would provide an important opportunity to engage society in a broader reflection to create a shared vision of education in Colombia's post-conflict transition. In the Scottish example, the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence was the heart of a general reflection about the purpose of education and what it means to be a young Scot growing up in today's world. In Colombia, the country's geographical and cultural diversity could be one element of this framework, for instance. At the same time, a national curriculum framework would not mean that there would not be room for local adaptations. Sufficient room for local and school-based adaptation will remain essential for making the curricular framework more pertinent and relevant for school communities. The development of a national curriculum will need to safeguard the rights of ethnic minorities and could involve the development of a specific national curriculum for these students. In New Zealand, for example, the national curriculum includes a curriculum for English-medium and for Māori-medium instruction.

In order for schools to truly exercise some or full autonomy for curriculum development, Secretaries of Education must support teachers and school leaders in designing content, lesson plans and teaching to effectively enable learning; the greater the curricular autonomy, the more support is needed. Building schools' and teachers' capacity for curriculum development and implementation is essential as it has a great impact on students' learning and achievements, and the ways in which a school uses curriculum and assessment to engage and motivate its students. Teacher learning and support will remain crucial also if a national curriculum framework is developed to enable teachers to make sense of the new curriculum policy and to change their beliefs and practice.

Lastly, a more coherent curriculum framework – in addition to more resources as discussed in Chapter 2 – would support efforts to provide students and teachers with access to good quality educational materials, and support teachers in their use of pertinent, updated pedagogical materials. Initiatives such as *Compra Eficiente* should also be sustained and promoted. In rural and remote areas, ICT resources could be used to facilitate the coverage of the curriculum and a broad curricular offer, where connectivity allows and based on analysis of costs and benefits, ensuring sufficient teacher and school leader preparation to embed distance learning approaches in schools effectively. This will require further efforts to articulate responsibilities between ministries (MEN, MinTIC, MinMinas) and across levels of government, for instance, to ensure that not only municipalities but also schools within them have sufficient energy and connectivity.

*Ensure schools are prepared for and supported in the implementation of full-day schooling, including small rural schools*

More time does not automatically lead to more learning. It is crucial that the implementation of full-day schooling which entails a significant investment of resources includes specific provisions on the effective use of the additional time. The introduction of full-day schooling gives schools the opportunity to reflect about their curriculum and pedagogical practices, an opportunity that should be fully embraced by schools. Inevitably, such a change will take time and requires the support of Secretaries of Education.

Furthermore, the implementation plan of full-day schooling should also consider the teaching profession. It is essential to provide teachers with training that allows them to strengthen their teaching skills and pedagogical practices in order to effectively use the time in class and respond appropriately to the needs of their students. Greater school leadership that creates conditions in schools for peer learning has an important role to play in this (see Chapter 4 for further recommendations).

The success of Colombia's policy and investment in expanding learning time will depend on the extent to which the above-mentioned challenges (as well as those mentioned in Chapter 2 in relation to infrastructure and complementary services) are addressed and teachers have the working conditions and pedagogical skills to manage their classrooms and spend more time on effective instruction. Teachers should receive more preparation and support in effective classroom management, be it for large classes in main school sites or urban schools, or small multi-grade settings. Learning from effective peers within their school cluster could be one promising strategy. As classes may become smaller in the long run due to demographic changes, teacher resources should be targeted at those who are likely to benefit the most: disadvantaged students and students in pre-primary and primary education (OECD, 2017<sup>[7]</sup>).

Previous research for Colombia has shown the potential of full-day schooling in improving the conditions of the poorest schools and those in rural areas (Hincapié, 2016<sup>[75]</sup>). Research from Germany and Switzerland, however, points to the risks that more instruction time may actually exacerbate inequities as advantaged students may be better positioned to take advantage of additional learning time (Cattaneo, Oggenfuss and Wolter, 2017<sup>[102]</sup>; Huebener, Kuger and Marcus, 2017<sup>[103]</sup>). Based on research in Italy, Meroni and Abbiati (2016<sup>[104]</sup>) suggest that more learning time may also affect girls and boys differently.

The government should, therefore, prioritise disadvantaged schools or schools with a large number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in an attempt to reduce equity gaps in education and monitor the effects of full-day schooling on different groups of students. The selection of schools offering a full school day must mainly take their economic and social vulnerability into account and must include pedagogical innovations specially designed for rural contexts. Moreover, to be successful, the implementation of full-day schooling must include the voice of parents and students (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>).

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that more learning time can actually lead to fatigue and boredom among students and burnout among teachers (Patall, Cooper and Allen, 2010<sup>[105]</sup>). Therefore, it seems necessary to monitor students' and teachers' levels of stress and fatigue.

*Improve the provision of education to meet students' needs and interests, and provide them all with equal learning opportunities irrespective of background*

Colombia has made tremendous improvements in the last two decades in expanding the coverage of compulsory education. Nevertheless, further work is needed to continue ensuring access to school and continuity for students who are considered to be particularly vulnerable.

Greater investments in high-quality early childhood education and care as discussed in Chapter 2, and a more equitable distribution of teachers as analysed in Chapter 4, will be essential to address existing inequities. For early childhood education and care, this also includes the effective articulation between different types of provision, particularly for

3-5 year-olds who can attend early childhood education or pre-school. Also, the organisation of the school system (e.g. through the development of data-tracking systems and early-warning indicators for students at risk of dropping out) and schools (e.g. through strong partnerships between schools and families) has a role to play in overcoming disadvantage (Dietrichson et al., 2017<sup>[106]</sup>; OECD, forthcoming<sup>[20]</sup>).

Flexible education models provide an important pedagogical strategy to address different learning needs. The freedom to develop and use flexible models has led to much innovation in education in Colombia, and the country should build on this tradition and strength in the future – potentially providing a model for other countries in areas like rural and post-conflict education. However, the ministry and Secretaries of Education need to maintain regular oversight over the use of flexible models to ensure and improve their quality. This could involve reducing the number of models currently recognised by the ministry to those that have proven to be effective. For those that will continue to exist, it seems necessary to further support teaching and learning processes as well as improve the pedagogical materials for teachers and students, some of which are outdated.

There are also flexible models in use that are not regulated or recognised by the ministry. Secretaries of Education need to play a stronger role in the regular review and quality assurance of these flexible models used within their schools, and support schools and teachers in implementing all models irrespective of their owner (e.g. through adequate preparation and training for teachers to bring pedagogical approaches to life in classrooms). The ministry could consider requirements for flexible models to undergo evaluation processes within a specified time to ensure their effectiveness.

Taking steps to improve the offer of upper secondary education and facilitating students' transitions to tertiary education or the labour market should be a priority in the coming years for the ministry and Secretaries of Education (in collaboration with other relevant actors like SENA, employers and universities), given that completion of this level will be compulsory for all young people by 2030. The ministry should develop additional steps for guidance counselling which should allocate counsellors to the most disadvantaged schools and could draw on insights from behavioural research (OECD, forthcoming<sup>[20]</sup>).

In rural areas, in particular, education may not always be pertinent to the needs of students in their context, especially at the upper secondary level. Addressing the needs of young people in rural areas goes beyond education alone and also requires the creation of opportunities in rural areas, e.g. through access to markets, credit and technology. Education, however, needs to be connected with rural life and the productive realities of rural areas, such as improvements in the agricultural sector and the emergence of new sectors, if it is to motivate young people to remain in or move to rural areas (Echazarra and Radinger, forthcoming<sup>[3]</sup>; Montero and Uccelli, 2016<sup>[39]</sup>).

At the same time, schools, and particularly vocational programmes, can under some conditions play a role in maintaining and revitalising rural communities. Schools can integrate academic and vocational education in many ways, such as through collaborations with local businesses, job shadowing and school-to-work programmes. “Farm-to-school” programmes which develop purchasing relations between school meal operations and local producers, the cultivation of school gardens and farm field trips provide another example that schools can work in purposeful ways to contribute to the development of rural communities (Schafft, 2016<sup>[107]</sup>).

The learning and development of children and young people from ethnic communities also require further attention. Although the education sector has been sensitive to the

needs of the country's ethnic groups, developing a wide array of ethnic education models and promoting the creation of ethnic groups' own intercultural education systems; there are still some aspects that raise concern and should be addressed.

First, the ministry and ethnic groups need to reflect about the processes for developing such systems and the mechanisms in place for their approval since the process is very long at present. Second, it seems necessary to develop a framework for developing such systems that clearly outlines the financing of and overseeing of these systems as well as their relationship with the rest of the education system, to avoid a potential fragmentation. Third, the ministry should consider mainstreaming intercultural education in all schools, not only in those serving ethnic communities or located in areas where ethnic communities are settled. For instance, indigenous communities' relationship to their land and the environment or relations between generations could inform environmental and citizenship education (UNESCO, 2016<sup>[108]</sup>).

Finally, resources and support for students with special educational need to be improved. At present, there is a normative framework for the inclusion of students with special needs into mainstream schools, but a clear plan for the implementation of inclusive education is still required. The ministry has to develop such plans in the short term, specifying the number of support staff and assistants needed for the inclusion of students with special needs and their training needs, infrastructure requirements and the standardised protocols for diagnosing students with special educational needs. High-quality processes to identify special needs are not only important to avoid labelling students and to ensure that they receive the pedagogical support they require, but also to avoid rising costs as special needs students have a higher weighting in the current per-student funding allocation (see Chapter 2). Moreover, the implementation plan must provide guidelines to support inclusive education in small rural schools where this is likely to be more challenging and costly (e.g. for the creation of resources centres for inclusion in particular schools that provide support for others).

*Develop a more comprehensive approach to school evaluation and further promote school improvement processes*

Colombia needs to embrace a more comprehensive vision of school evaluation including i) standardised assessments of students' learning outcomes; ii) school self-evaluation; and iii) external evaluation of school processes.

In relation to the first approach, standardised assessments – which provide valuable information about student learning and can inform teaching – greatly influence schools' decisions and in practice often define what students should learn in Colombia. Assessments in Colombia fulfil a strong public accountability function which has recently been reinforced through the setting of performance goals for individual schools. As is well established, high-stakes testing can potentially have negative effects for teaching and learning, such as teachers giving more emphasis on tested subjects and reducing their emphasis on important subjects that are not part of the mandated testing programme (OECD, 2013<sup>[51]</sup>; Stecher and Hamilton, 2002<sup>[109]</sup>).

The strong role of standardised assessments in Colombian schools is also linked to the absence of a coherent curriculum framework and a clear set of learning standards or progressions as discussed. Establishing a more concise set of learning goals and standards (as through the development of a common curriculum framework) and building teachers' understanding of them so they have a clearer sense of what they should be aiming for in

relation to students' learning would help reduce the potential undesired effects of standardised assessment (Stecher and Hamilton, 2002<sub>[109]</sub>).

The ministry (and ICFES) should moreover consider expanding “what counts” in their accountability systems to include more than just the core areas (Stecher and Hamilton, 2002<sub>[109]</sub>), given that the aims of primary and secondary education clearly go beyond the acquisition of verbal and numerical skills. The *Pruebas Saber* for Years 5 and 9 consider citizenship and science on a changing basis, but additional sample-based assessments could be introduced for other subject areas and learning objectives. To avoid overburdening schools and the system, this would need to be designed carefully, for instance, by varying subjects and competencies over time, and year levels assessed. In general, authorities should clarify the purposes of individual assessments to encourage their appropriate use.

Regarding the second approach, Colombia needs to further develop and support structured school self-evaluation processes. At present, the ministry requires schools to conduct school self-evaluation every year, based on the results to develop an improvement plan; but the main limitation of these plans is that they seem to be exclusively focused on student learning outcomes, without analysing and improving school processes. The recommendation, therefore, is to strengthen Secretaries of Education's capacity to provide school leaders with sound technical pedagogical support, so they can in turn fully exercise their pedagogical leadership within their schools, providing teachers with guidance and support on how to transform results into adjustment or change of their pedagogical practices. School self-evaluation should not be seen as an accountability mechanism, but as an opportunity to improve (OECD, 2013<sub>[51]</sub>).

Colombia needs to develop whole school evaluation processes, emphasising the formative aspect of evaluation and the need to promote school actors' engagement in reflecting about their educational practices and how to improve them. While there are some departments and municipalities that have a small body of school supervisors, the country would greatly benefit from the creation of a national quality agency responsible for evaluating school-level processes which could provide guidance on fundamental internal processes such as staff evaluation, school self-evaluation and curriculum development and implementation. Such an agency can collect valuable qualitative information on schools - including direct observation of classroom practice - and use that information to provide teachers and school leaders with feedback on how to improve teachers' pedagogical practices and students' learning (OECD, 2013<sub>[51]</sub>). Chile, for instance, introduced an agency in 2011 that fulfils this role, the Agency for Quality Education (see Santiago et al. (2017<sub>[110]</sub>) for further information).

Lastly, more effective use should be made of the valuable data available at all levels, from the ministry in order to design relevant policy, Secretaries of Education in order to target resources and support, and schools in order to adapt teaching to students' learning. School leadership, teachers and the school communities should receive further support and training to analyse and use assessment data and results from evaluations to foster change and improvement processes. This should include building teachers' (and students') ability to develop their own approaches to assessing learning (OECD, 2013<sub>[51]</sub>). Assessments could also be reviewed so they provide teachers and students with timely and useful feedback to improve learning and instruction. As a matter of fact, further developing the other two approaches to school evaluation – self-evaluation and external evaluation of school processes – may also contribute to strengthening schools' capacity to promote improvement processes.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to international classifications, private schools refer to schools managed directly or indirectly by a non-government organisation, such as a church, trade union, business or other private institution. Depending on whether or not they receive funding from the government, private schools can be considered government-independent (50% or more of their funding comes from private sources) or government-dependent (at least 50% of their funding comes from the government).

<sup>2</sup> Regulations specify that priority is given to students that are already enrolled in a school, after which new students can be assigned. For new students, the priority is given in the following order: students with special needs or gifted students; students entering Year 0; victims of the conflict or vulnerable students; students with siblings attending the same school; students who have left the system and want to return; students in social rehabilitation, and all others that had signed up during the process; and lastly, students who had not registered but need to be enrolled.

<sup>3</sup> These enrolments include students in pre-primary to upper secondary education. In Colombia, government-dependent private provision is counted as part of public enrolment. When taking government-dependent and independent private provision together, 24.0% of students in pre-school and school education were enrolled in some form of private provision in 2017.

<sup>4</sup> The General Education Law (Law 115) of 1994 established that schools that only offer some levels of education must establish agreements with other establishments with a similar or complementary educational project to guarantee continuity of education for their students. The law also established the possibility for schools to form associations, including between public and private schools, to provide a more efficient service. According to the law, the central government should encourage and incentivise such associations.

<sup>5</sup> In the department of Nariño, the departmental and municipal secretaries of Nariño and Ipiales have 1.1 and 1.3 sites per rural school respectively, while in the department of La Guajira, the education authorities of the certified municipalities of Uribe and Maicao, have 15 and 11.2 sites per rural school. Looking at urban schools, the certified municipality of Tulua holds the highest number of sites, with five on average. The vast number of urban schools has between two and three sites.

<sup>6</sup> In 2017, there were 6 301 principals, 12 253 co-ordinators, 1 497 rural directors, and 804 other school leaders. Other school leaders include education supervisors (*supervisores de educación*) and core leaders (*directores de núcleo*). These roles do not exist in all certified territorial entities.

<sup>7</sup> Cycles comprise Years 1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9 and 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> In the department of Vichada, for example, there is a distinct calendar for rural schools which covers four weeks of instruction on selected Saturdays and which has different school holiday arrangements.

<sup>9</sup> For primary and lower secondary education, the fundamental and mandatory areas include: 1. Natural sciences and environmental education; 2. Social sciences, history, geography, political constitution and democracy; 3. Artistic Education; 4. Ethical education and human values; 5. Physical education, recreation and sports; 6. Religious education; 7. Humanities, Spanish and foreign languages; 8. Mathematics; and 9. Technology and computing. For upper secondary education, the fundamental and mandatory areas of knowledge are the same as in primary and lower secondary, but at a more advanced level in addition to economics, political science, and philosophy.

<sup>10</sup> Data on student enrolments in flexible education models and ethnic education as well as the share of special needs and gifted students are based on enrolments in compulsory education, from



the transition year to the end of upper secondary education, in public and government-dependent private/contracted provision. The data on flexible education models exclude ethnic education.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, language and mathematics textbooks were distributed as part of the Let's All Learn programme (*Programa Todos a Aprender*, PTA); a literary collection (*Colección Semilla*) was distributed as part of the National Reading and Writing Plan (*Plan Nacional de Lectura y Escritura*, PNLE); and educational materials for rural schools including books for students and teaching guidelines for teachers, were distributed as part of the Rural Education Programme (*Programa de Educación Rural*, PER).

<sup>12</sup> In 2016, the programme received 55% less budget than originally planned for 2015-18. In 2017, the reduction amounted to 84%.

<sup>13</sup> The ICFES is also responsible for the administration of the state examinations for tertiary education (*Saber Pro* and *Saber TyT*) and co-ordinates Colombia's participation in international assessments such as the OECD PISA and the assessments carried out by the UNESCO Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE).

<sup>14</sup> *Supérate con el Saber* is a national competition which rewards schools with the highest participation in the assessment and gives financial incentives to individual students.

<sup>15</sup> These data on enrolments in upper secondary education include public and government-dependent private/contracted provision.

<sup>16</sup> The increase in the probability for youth in the first cohort to access higher education was 31.8 percentage points, while the increase for young people in the second cohort was 25.8 percentage points. In addition, the effect on access to quality tertiary education as indicated by the accreditation of institutions was 46.1 percentage points and 41.2 percentage points respectively.

<sup>17</sup> The ministry of education has developed a Strategy for the Articulation Between Upper Secondary and Tertiary Education (*Estrategia de Articulación de la Educación Media con la Educación Superior y la Formación para el Trabajo*) and a Programme for Strengthening Technical and Technological Education (*Programa de Fortalecimiento de la Educación Técnica y Tecnológica*), for example.

<sup>18</sup> These data include enrolments in compulsory education from the transition year to the end of upper secondary education.

<sup>19</sup> As Colombia's integrated household survey (*Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares*, GEIH) for 2016 highlights, adults in urban areas have an average of 3.6 years more education than adults in rural areas, and illiteracy is more than twice as high in rural areas than the national average (Sánchez, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> In Colombia, all 15-year-olds were in a school whose principal reported that school internal evaluations are in place, compared to 93% on average across OECD countries, 94% in Chile, 92% in Peru, 90% in Costa Rica, 88% in Spain, and 86% in Mexico. In Portugal, 100% of principals also reported school evaluations. School principals in Colombia reported to predominantly take action to improve student achievement (87%) and the quality of teaching and learning (84%), but less so for developing teachers (62%) or educating staff (53%).

<sup>21</sup> The boarding school enrolment is classified as: *internos* (full-time boarding school students) for students who live most of the academic year in school, *semi-internos* (part-time boarding school students), for students staying in the school longer hours, similar to a full school day, and *externos* (external), for students who go to school only during school hours.

<sup>22</sup> García et al. (2016), using administrative data, found that only 11.6% of school sites offering upper secondary education have a counsellor and the shortage is observed equally in schools offering academic or vocational programmes.

<sup>23</sup> Implemented by the Foundation of Businesses for Education (*Fundación Empresarios por la Educación*), the programme started back in 2010 with the aim of encouraging the development of leadership skills in public schools. The programme targets the whole leadership team (school principals and co-ordinators) to provide them with the information and tools to successfully perform their pedagogical, management, administrative and community responsibilities; as well as with technical support to implement the school transformation plan. With the support of local governments, the programme has grown progressively in scale and now operates in five municipalities (Bogotá, Itagui, Manizales, Medellín and Cali) and three departments (Cundinamarca, Antioquia and Atlántico) (OECD, 2016<sup>[14]</sup>).

<sup>24</sup> During the review visit, for instance, the team learned about some forms of school networks within certain certified territorial entities, such as Tolima and Quindío, and the ministry of education has been creating networks through the project *Colegios Líderes por la Excelencia - Aliados 10* with the support of two other organisations.

<sup>25</sup> Schools in the top quintile of the performance distribution (of time use) average 82% while schools in the bottom quintile average 49%. For schools in the lowest quintile, the average of the time spent teaching by the single best teacher in each school is 78% while the average for the worst teacher in each school is 18%.

<sup>26</sup> Through Law 1620 of 2013, the national government has created a National System for School Coexistence, Human Rights Education, Sex Education, and the Prevention and Mitigation of School Violence (*Sistema Nacional de Convivencia Escolar y formación para los derechos humanos, la educación para la sexualidad y la prevención y mitigación de la violencia escolar*). This system aims to form active and tolerant citizens and to address the challenges of a post-conflict society. The system has created committees at the national, territorial (one for each certified territorial entity) and school level, and these are formed by a wide array of stakeholders. Within schools, coexistence committees are responsible for resolving conflicts and promoting a peaceful coexistence, whilst ensuring all the necessary requirements for students' integral attention are in place.

<sup>27</sup> These data include only compulsory education from the transition year to the end of upper secondary education.

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### Annex 3.A. The public funding of private providers

In case of limited capacity or some other form of limitation, Secretaries of Education can provide education by contracting private providers as regulated by Decree 1851 of 2015.

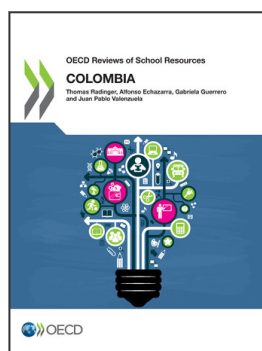
**Contracts to offer the educational service (*contratos de prestación del servicio educativo*):** The Secretary of Education hires the owner of a private school for a single year from a regulated bank of providers. The provider is responsible for providing all teachers and school staff. It also must ensure the provision of all components of the educational basket (*canasta educativa*). This is the main modality used in the country, representing 58.5% of all contracts with private providers in 2017.

**Contract via tender (*contratos para la administración del servicio educativo*):** Through a selection process, the provider can manage one or more public schools. The Secretary of Education provides financial resources per student, some complementary elements, and ensures enrolment, but the private entity (natural or legal person) ensures the remaining elements. The contract is for a period of between 2 to 12 years.

**Contracts with churches and other religious entities (*contratos con iglesias o confesiones religiosas*):** These contracts are for one year. The Secretary of Education can provide the infrastructure and other components of the educational basket. Religious entities can take responsibility for infrastructure, teachers, and other requirements.

**Contracts via demand subsidy (*contratos mediante subsidios a la demanda*):** Certified municipalities with more than 300 000 inhabitants can contract private entities through one-year contracts to provide education to students previously served by the first type of contract. Only 4% of the contracts are of this modality (Sánchez, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>). In Bogotá, for example, the *Programa de Ampliación de Cobertura de la Educación Secundaria*, (PACES) developed in the 1990s delivered vouchers to 125 000 high-performing vulnerable students to access private schools. In an impact evaluation, Bettinger et al. (2010<sup>[11]</sup>) concluded that the participating students achieved a better performance in standardised assessments, higher school completion and lower repetition rates.

Providers need to meet minimum standards specific to each type of contract which are monitored by the Secretary of Education contracting the provider. For the **first type of contract**, the private school must have achieved results in the last standardised assessments (*Pruebas Saber*) that are higher than the 35th percentile in language and mathematics among schools within the same certified territorial entity. Similar rules apply to the **third and fourth type of contracts**, but the comparison group are the 30th and 40th percentiles of schools respectively. For the **second type of contract**, the private provider must prove experience in providing education, but is fully autonomous in managing and organising education in line with its educational project and the provisions set out in the contract. The Secretary of Education should supervise the maintenance and use of the school infrastructure and materials as well as the quality of education. The school performance indicator (ISCE) should provide a reference point in this process.



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