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**ROUND TABLE ON SCHOOL DROPOUT IN THE AMERICAS
Committee on Education, Culture, Science and Technology
September 7th, 2011, 15:30 to 18:30 p.m.**

Final Report on School Dropout in the Americas

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right enshrined in a number of international legal documents such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (in force since 1981), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (in force since 1990) and, primarily, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (adopted in 1948) and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (in force since 1976). Education is indispensable to exercising other human rights, since it is through education that individuals become autonomous and develop the tools needed to fully participate in the life of their community¹. This is why “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality”².

However, such a conception of the right to education implies more than access to school. It also means a quality education in which all individuals learn effectively and complete a basic level. It thus implies the implementation of concrete means to ensure children stay in school. One can see how the international community’s thinking has changed in this regard with the *World Declaration on Education for All* (1990), in which the signatories highlight the need to broaden their perspective on education in order to promote equity and learning achievement³. The second of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG, 2000) also reflects this change in thinking. It is aimed at ensuring that all of the world’s children are able to complete a full course of primary schooling by supporting their success in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as the completion of primary school at an appropriate age⁴.

¹ COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS. *General Comments 13*, 1999, p. 1 [http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G99/462/17/PDF/G9946217.pdf?OpenElement].

² UNITED NATIONS. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 26.2 [http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/], consulted July 2, 2009.

³ WORLD CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION FOR ALL. *World Declaration on Education for All*, UNESCO, Paris, 1990, pp. 5–8 [http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/jomtien_declaration.shtml].

⁴ UNITED NATIONS. *Millennium Development Goals Report 2008*, UN, New York, 2008 [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/The%20Millennium%20Development%20Goals%20Report%202008.pdf].

Tackling the subject of school dropout also seems relevant in the Americas. Latin American school systems are characterized by insufficient preschool education coverage, a high rate of access to basic education, and poor student retention both at the primary and secondary level⁵. Canada and the US also face the problem of school dropout, with average dropout rates compared to other OECD countries⁶. Nonetheless, innovative initiatives have been put forward in a number of States of the Americas. Dialogue on these solutions is therefore of prime importance.

A number of countries of the Americas have enshrined the right to education in their constitutions. For example, article 3 of Mexico's Constitution establishes the right and obligation of citizens to receive a basic education, while article 31 affirms the responsibility of parents and guardians in the education of their children. Costa Rica has amended its Constitution to provide for a minimum investment in education amounting to 8% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

This document is divided into five parts. The first describes how the Committee on Education, Culture, Science and Technology examined the issue; the second looks at problems and issues relating to school dropout; the third outlines the situation prevailing in the Americas; the fourth focuses on certain initiatives put forward by the region's governments; and the fifth and final part concerns the strategies implemented in Québec to fight school dropout.

2. How the Committee Examined the Issue

The theme of school dropout in the Americas was formally taken up by the Committee during its meeting held in Salta, Argentina, on September 17, 2009, as part of the 9th General Assembly of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA). At that time a preliminary report was presented to the Committee members, and a call went out for contributions regarding the initiatives undertaken by various countries of the Americas to fight school dropout. The purpose of this was to gather sufficient contributions to complete the preliminary report and ultimately to table the present final report.

Six Committee members responded with contributions and, during the round table on school dropout which took place in Québec City on September 7, 2011, as part of COPA's 11th General Assembly, described the initiatives implemented in their countries to fight school dropout. The six parliamentarians were

- ✓ Carlos Jiménez Macías, Senator of the Federal Congress of Mexico and former COPA President;
- ✓ Ileana Brenes Jiménez, Deputy of the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Costa Rica;
- ✓ Norma Esparza Herrera, Senator of the Federal Congress of Mexico;
- ✓ Rosa Rosario Muñoz, Deputy of the Parliament of the Province of Chubut, Argentina;
- ✓ Alicia Tabarés, Deputy of the Parliament of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina;
- ✓ Michel Pigeon, Member of the National Assembly of Québec and rapporteur for the Committee.

⁵ E. ESPÍNDOLA AND A. LEÓN. "La deserción escolar en América Latina: un tema prioritario para la agenda regional", *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*, No. 30, Ediciones OEI, 2002 [<http://www.rieoei.org/rie30a02.htm>], consulted July 8, 2009.

⁶ P. DE BROUCKER. *Le décrochage scolaire : perspective internationale et pistes de réflexion de politiques*, Canadian Policy Research Networks, Ottawa, 2006 [http://www.cprn.org/documents/46333_en.pdf].

The contributions gathered during the round table were used to expand the preliminary report with a view to tabling a final version at the Committee's next meeting.

3. Problems and Issues Relating to School Dropout

3.1. Definition of School Dropout

In general, education encompasses all means of ensuring human training and development. Schooling is one such means. It is a path, generally consisting of a primary and then a secondary level, which culminates in certification that recognizes knowledge and skills.

School dropout is the interruption of this minimum expected path. Nevertheless, it is not easy to define the problem. Therefore, while some researchers suggest that a young person be considered a "dropout" whenever he or she is absent from school without permission for two consecutive weeks, others question the use of the label if the student eventually obtains a diploma, even several years late. However, one might also assert that dropouts are those who, at a given age, discontinue their studies toward completion of a certain level of schooling and who have not obtained official certification recognizing knowledge and skills for the level in question.

3.2. Causes of Dropout

Researchers agree that dropping out of school is an extremely complex process that takes root very early in an individual's life. It is a multidimensional phenomenon caused by a combination of factors that can be organized into the following five categories⁷:

1. *Factors related to school life*: falling behind or repeatedly failing, lack of academic and social ability, absenteeism, etc.
2. *Factors related to personal life*: drug addiction, delinquency, teen pregnancy, etc.
3. *Factors related to the family*: insufficient support and instability in the family unit, low level of parental education, little value given to school, etc.
4. *Social factors*: isolation, unsuitable housing, inadequate diet, illness, recent immigration under difficult conditions, etc.
5. *Economic factors*: low parental income or parents who are not active in the labour market, part-time work by young people, etc.

In the Americas, the relative weight of each cause varies from country to country, and sometimes from region to region within the same country. In Mexico's national youth survey carried out in 2005, a large proportion of respondents reported that socio-economic conditions had been a significant factor in their dropping out. Indeed, 42% said they dropped out in order to work. Another significant cause was the family's slight regard for education, and 12.1% of the respondents reported that their parents did not want them to continue their schooling⁸.

⁷ MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT DU QUÉBEC. *New Approaches, New Solutions: Fostering Success for Secondary School Students in Disadvantaged Areas*, Gouvernement du Québec, Québec, 2002 [http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/Agirautrement/agir_a.pdf].

⁸ See graph, Appendix I.

But these data must be interpreted with a degree of caution. A student who drops out to go to work may do so for any number of reasons, not necessarily linked to socio-economic conditions. A dropout may go to work out of personal interest. It would therefore be enlightening to discover the causal relations underlying this type of dropping out. So too, the fact that parents wish their children to leave school may in some cases be explained by financial necessity. In such cases, parents, despite their high regard for education, may be constrained to have their children leave school in order to provide the family with basic necessities.

The quality of education may also be a factor in school dropout. In Costa Rica, between 2006 and 2010, there was a significant difference between the dropout rates in the private and public school systems⁹. A number of reasons may be responsible for this. Families' socio-economic conditions may partly explain it, if we hypothesize that private school students tend to come from more well-to-do families and are therefore much less likely to have to get a job in order to provide basic necessities. Nonetheless, the quality of education has also been raised as a factor which may help explain why some public school students lose interest in their studies. According to Costa Rican Deputy Ileana Brenes Jiménez, one may speak in such cases of school-instigated dropout, in the sense that the responsibility lies within the education system itself. Since the quality of education is higher in the private system, private school students show far more interest in continuing their studies. If the same conditions were made to prevail in the public system, public school students would be that much more inclined to complete their programs.

3.2.1. Problems of Access to Education

The geographical distribution of the population makes access to education problematic in some countries, particularly in rural areas. It is difficult for a government to offer high quality, accessible education services throughout a country that includes sparsely populated rural and agricultural areas. Rural communities are sometimes discouraged by the sheer distances separating them from their schools, all the more so when means of transportation are limited and socio-economic conditions difficult.

In addition, the linguistic diversity of indigenous populations, such as those of Mexico, constitutes a challenge for governments that wish to improve access to education while respecting the mores and characteristics of certain groups or communities.

3.3. Consequences of Dropout

Because education is perceived as essential to the development of both individuals and society as a whole¹⁰, dropping out of school is considered a serious threat to individuals' quality of life and society's capacity to adapt¹¹. There are grave consequences both for dropouts and for society.

With regard to individual consequences, we would note that "an individual's educational attainment is one of the most important determinants of their life chances in terms of

⁹ See graph, Appendix II.

¹⁰ Op. cit. WORLD CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION FOR ALL, p. 6.

¹¹ M. JANOSZ. "L'abandon scolaire chez les adolescents : perspective nord-américaine", *VEI-Enjeux* 122 (2000), p. 106.

employment, income, health status, housing and many other amenities”¹². It is also worth noting that many of the young people who leave school at an early age present social adaptation problems such as behaviour issues and delinquency¹³.

As regards the economic impact on society, dropout leads in particular to a marked decline in economic productivity as well as a considerable increase in social program spending¹⁴. Other notable consequences include a decline in tax revenue, an increase in income security payments, and a shortage of qualified labour. School dropout also results in significant social costs. Those who do not obtain a high school diploma are less likely to participate in politics, perform volunteer work, or become involved in a social cause¹⁵. What’s more, to the extent that dropping out leads to the intergenerational reproduction of socio-economic inequality, it also has a negative impact on social integration and, therefore, on the strengthening of democracy¹⁶.

4. Current State of Affairs in the Americas

The many approaches to the issue of dropout means that the dropout rate is calculated differently depending on the place and time. International comparisons are therefore difficult.

Nevertheless, data is encouraging for all the Americas with respect to primary schools. In 2006 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 95% of children theoretically of primary school age were attending an educational institution¹⁷. Moreover, in 2005 the survival rate to the last primary grade¹⁸ in the region as a whole was 85%¹⁹. In the US for the same year, the primary school enrolment rate was 98.6% for children aged 7 to 13²⁰, the survival rate to the last primary grade was 96%²¹, and the percentage of the population aged 15 or over who had completed only five years of primary school was 1.6%²². In Canada, primary school data is not collected in the census due to the low percentage of the population not having completed this level of education²³.

Statistics on school dropout at the secondary level are more mixed. The 2004–2005 Canadian dropout rate²⁴ was estimated at 9.8%²⁵, while in the US in 2004 the number of individuals aged

¹² H. M. LEVIN, C. BELFIELD, P. MUENNIG AND C. ROUSE. *Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education for All of America’s Children*. New York: Columbia University, 2007
[http://www.cbcse.org/media/download_gallery/Leeds_Report_Final_Jan2007.pdf].

¹³ LABORATOIRE DE RECHERCHES POUR LE SOUTIEN DES COMMUNAUTÉS. *Le décrochage scolaire dans la Commission scolaire de Rouyn-Noranda*, 2005 [<http://www.uqat.ca/repertoire/telechargements/raccrochage.pdf>].

¹⁴ E. ESPÍNDOLA AND A. LEÓN. Op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁵ CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L’ÉDUCATION. *Contre l’abandon scolaire au secondaire*, Sainte-Foy, 1996, p. 8.

¹⁶ E. ESPÍNDOLA AND A. LEÓN. Op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁷ Op. cit. UNITED NATIONS. *MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS REPORT 2008*.

¹⁸ The survival rate by grade is calculated by dividing the total number of students in a cohort who each year attain successive studies at a given level by the number of students in the cohort, i.e., those initially enrolled in the first year of primary schooling.

¹⁹ UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION. “Regional Overview: Latin America and the Caribbean”. In *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO, Paris, 2009, p. 4
[<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001784/178428e.pdf>].

²⁰ NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS. *Digest of Education Statistics: 2007*

[http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_007.asp?referrer=list], consulted July 8, 2009.

²¹ UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION. *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO, Paris, 2009, p. 4.

²² Op. cit. NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS.

²³ STATISTICS CANADA. “Education questions on the 2006 Census of Population: New questions for a new century”, [<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2006004/9541-eng.htm>], consulted July 10, 2009.

²⁴ The Canadian dropout rate is defined as the proportion of those aged 20 to 24 who do not attend school and have not completed secondary studies.

16 to 24 considered dropouts was 11%²⁶. For Latin America and the Caribbean, an identical dropout rate measurement was not found. However, in 2006, the net enrolment ratio (NER²⁷) at the secondary level was 70% in this region²⁸. Moreover, it is estimated that for 2000–2004, only 37% of young Latin Americans (aged 18 to 24) had completed secondary studies²⁹. According to the OAS's Regional Education Indicators Project, the Bahamas and Barbados were the only countries in Latin America and the Caribbean where more than 75% of those aged 20 to 24 had a high school diploma. In 13 other countries in the region, the rate of high school completion was under 50%³⁰.

In addition to the discrepancies among countries, there are also significant differences within them. For example, in both Latin American countries and in Canada, individuals living in rural areas are more affected by school dropout than those in urban ones. On the one hand, in Canada the dropout rate outside of large urban centers was 16.7% in 2004–2005 compared to 8.6% in metropolitan areas³¹. On the other hand, although one third of the urban population in Latin America had completed secondary studies in 2000–2004, only 6% of the rural population had done so³². The US was the lone exception, with a dropout rate of 11% in rural areas and 13% in urban ones³³.

Differences are also observed in population characteristics. Throughout the Americas, men are more likely to drop out of secondary school than women. In Latin America and the Caribbean, secondary school attendance rates are much higher among individuals in the quintile representing the most affluent families than among those in the quintile representing the most disadvantaged families³⁴. It should be noted that throughout the Americas, in general, individuals belonging to cultural minorities present higher dropout rates than the rest of the student population³⁵.

5. Initiatives to Fight School Dropout in the Americas

Governments have responded to the dropout problem in many different ways, with highly varying degrees of success. The sample initiatives cited here are not intended to reflect the

²⁵ STATISTICS CANADA. *Provincial Drop-out Rates - Trends and Consequences* [<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2005004/8984-eng.htm>]

²⁶ NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS. *Status of Education in Rural America* [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/ruraled/chapter2_4.asp], consulted July 10, 2009.

²⁷ The NER represents individuals in an official age group at a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population.

²⁸ Op. cit. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009*, p. 355.

²⁹ SISTEMA DE INFORMACIÓN DE TENDENCIAS EDUCATIVAS EN AMÉRICA LATINA. *Informe 2006 sobre tendencias sociales y educativas en América latina*, 2006, p. 51 [http://www.siteal.iipe-oei.org/informetendencias/uti/download_attach.asp?TipoDownload=INFORME_TENDENCIAS&ArchInforme=INDICE.pdf].

³⁰ REGIONAL EDUCATION INDICATORS PROJECT. *Educational panorama 2007: achievements and challenges, 2007*, p. 41 [[http://www.prie.oas.org/documentos/Panorama_Esp_def%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.prie.oas.org/documentos/Panorama_Esp_def%20(2).pdf)].

³¹ Op. cit. STATISTICS CANADA. *Provincial Drop-out Rates - Trends and Consequences*.

³² Op. cit. SISTEMA DE INFORMACIÓN DE TENDENCIAS EDUCATIVAS EN AMÉRICA LATINA, p. 46.

³³ Op. cit. NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS. *Status of Education in Rural America*.

³⁴ Op. cit. UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION. "Regional Overview: Latin America and the Caribbean", p. 5.

³⁵ Op. cit. SISTEMA DE INFORMACIÓN DE TENDENCIAS EDUCATIVAS EN AMÉRICA LATINA, p. 64, and CANADIAN COUNCIL ON LEARNING, "Good news: Canada's High School Dropout Rates Are Falling" [<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LessonsInLearning/LiL-16Dec2005.htm>], consulted July 15, 2009.

issue from all angles but rather to show what actions some governments in the Americas are taking. They come from documentary research and from the contributions of COPA parliamentarians presented during the round table on school dropout in the Americas. They are presented below for each of the five categories of factors that lead to school dropout.

Factors related to school life:

- **PROEM** in Brazil: This program offers an alternative to conventional schooling for students experiencing academic and personal difficulties. Its main features include a curriculum that students develop themselves and follow at their own pace, evaluation based on daily observation of progress rather than graded exams, and an educational institution that is open continuously so that students can attend school according to a schedule that works for them. The program has been successful with respect to student retention and earlier school completion; 90% of PROEM students complete their basic education in less time³⁶.
- **Programa Tu Maestro en Línea y Buzón Escolar** in Mexico: This program is a homework -assistance telephone service for students and their parents. Specialized teachers are on hand to resolve doubts and answer questions concerning homework. The *Buzón Escolar* program is also intended to be a personalized information, guidance and reception service responding to complaints or questions about regular schools.
- **Abolition of school-year repetition** in Costa Rica: In 2009, Costa Rica eliminated the possibility that a student who failed a portion of his or her courses might be made to repeat the entire school year. The notion of “partial repetition” was introduced to improve the self-esteem of the young people concerned and therefore to combat disenchantment, cynicism, loss of motivation and lack of interest. Work carried out by the Costa Rican Department of Education shows a link between low self-esteem and school dropout.
- **Programa Juegos Deportivos Estudiantiles** in Costa Rica: This program promotes a healthy lifestyle through sports and social relations. Twelve sports are on the list, including tennis, track and field, cross-country running, volleyball, basketball, baseball, swimming, ping-pong.
- **Programa Festival Estudiantil de las Artes** in Costa Rica: Under this program, an annual event is organized that emphasizes forms of artistic expression developed by students throughout the country. The human dimension is central, and the program helps students improve their self-esteem and build a personal identity.
- **Programa Nacional Aprender Enseñando** in Argentina: The objective of this program is to support underachieving students living in disadvantaged environments with a view to reducing grade repetition and school dropout. It also fosters the social reintegration of dropouts. To this end, third-year English, Spanish and math education students assist teachers by giving complementary courses.
- **Changes in the school calendar and in evaluation methods** in Costa Rica: The school year is divided into three semesters. Prior to the reform of the school calendar, the mid-year vacation arbitrarily interrupted the second semester, with exams scheduled immediately afterwards. A better way of adapting the calendar to the school year was sought. Vacations were scheduled at the end of each semester, thus eliminating the arbitrary interruption of students’ learning in the second semester. As well, students experiencing difficulties can now request an extension of their semester to help them achieve a passing grade. Many students have said that this reform has contributed to their motivation and success.

³⁶ RED DE INNOVACIONES EDUCATIVAS PARA AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE
[<http://www.redinnovemos.org/content/view/460/103/lang,sp/>], consulted July 15, 2009.

Factors related to personal life:

- **Building Opportunities** in Costa Rica: This program aims to give teen mothers and pregnant teens social and personal training to better prepare them for social relations and prevent them from dropping out of regular school. In 2003, the program served around 10,000 girls, and impact assessments reveal improvements in girls' self-esteem, self-expression, and ability to command respect. Around 60% of participants remained in or returned to school³⁷.
- **Change from Within Program** in Jamaica: This initiative addresses school achievement problems among Jamaican boys. It aims to promote collaboration between elementary and high school principals with a view to developing strategies to improve their institutional environments. Solutions adopted by schools include encouraging parents to support school activities, promoting community involvement, and using art to build self-confidence³⁸.

Factors related to family life:

Many of the programs are focused primarily on socio-economic factors, including factors relating to family.

- **Escuelas a tiempo completo** in Uruguay: To break the cycle of poverty, Uruguay extended the school day in schools where socio-cultural needs were greatest. The strategy is supported by an educational project that takes into account students' family and social realities³⁹. Results of an independent evaluation show that both parents and teachers view "full-time schools" positively. Among other things, these schools play an enhanced educational and socializing role in the children's lives and increase the time parents can devote to work⁴⁰.
- **Programa Escuelas de Tiempo Completo (PECT)** in Mexico: This program was set up by Mexico's Department of Education in 2007 as a means of supporting students from disadvantaged environments by combating inequalities in terms of knowledge and learning development. The six-pronged program, whose main objective is to increase the time devoted to schooling, is geared to public schools providing basic education, especially in disadvantaged environments and indigenous or marginalized communities.

Social factors:

- **Escuela Nueva** in Colombia: The objective of this program is to offer a complete and high-quality primary education to children living in remote rural areas. It features a curriculum that is adapted to the rural experience and that encourages students to apply what they learn in school to community life. It also includes peer education (older students helping younger ones), designated learning spaces according to subject, and flexible promotion criteria. Studies confirm the positive impacts of this program, especially in terms of the development and quality of rural education, and lower school dropout rates⁴¹.

³⁷ UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION. *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003–2004*, p. 181 [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=23023&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html, p. 173], consulted July 10, 2009.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 187.

³⁹ ADMINISTRACIÓN NACIONAL DE EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA DEL URUGUAY. *Propuesta pedagógica para las escuelas de tiempo completo*. Uruguay, 1997 [http://www.mecaep.edu.uy/docs/pptc.pdf].

⁴⁰ EQUIPOS MORI. "Estudio de evaluación social de las escuelas de tiempo completo". Uruguay, 2001, p. 48 [http://www.mecaep.edu.uy].

⁴¹ PROGRAMA DE PROMOCIÓN DE LA REFORMA EDUCATIVA DE AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE

- **Adjustments for indigenous populations** in Mexico: Some countries of the Americas have committed to adjusting educational options to meet the needs of indigenous populations, thereby encouraging the members of these communities to take a greater interest in education. For example, Mexico offers community courses to indigenous populations and has also increased the number of indigenous-language courses and teachers.

Economic factors:

- **Progres/Oportunidades** in Mexico: The goal of the *Progres* program was to use education, health and nutrition initiatives to bring about lasting skill improvement in individuals living in extreme poverty. The education component consisted of granting monetary incentives to disadvantaged families with children who regularly attended school⁴². The *Oportunidades* program is an extension of *Progres* to urban zones. Evaluation of these programs reveals a lower dropout rate among participating students, better social reintegration⁴³, and a 20% increase in high school enrolment for girls and 10% for boys⁴⁴.
- **Bolsa escola** in Brazil: This program's mission is to reduce school dropout. It shares *Progres*'s strategy of granting subsidies to families with disadvantaged children in exchange for school attendance. Studies show positive impacts: significantly lower dropout, higher elementary school enrolment, and a 36% decrease in child labour in Brasilia.
- **Programa Prepa Sí** in Mexico: This Mexico City bursary program is open to students enrolled in secondary school and pre-university studies. In 2011, the program's success prompted authorities to extend it to university studies. Bursaries are conditional on the students completing their year of studies. Other conditions also apply depending on the level of education concerned.
- **Programa Avancemos** in Costa Rica: This program grants financial assistance to families experiencing financial difficulties. The goal is to fight school dropout caused by economic considerations. In exchange for financial assistance, participating parents agree to observe certain conditions concerning their children's school attendance. A contract is then signed by the parent or parents and the Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social. Indirectly, the program lessens the need for children to become wage earners, helps reduce poverty and promotes the goal of universal access to education⁴⁵. In 2010, 43.4% of students in Costa Rica's public school system benefited from this assistance.
- **Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH)** in Argentina: This fiscal measure has much in common with Costa Rica's *Avancemos* program. A monthly payment of US\$50 per child is paid to the person responsible for the child's welfare, until the child reaches the age of 18. In exchange, the authorities require a certificate of school attendance and a completed vaccination plan. The payment increases to US\$200 for handicapped children, with no age limit. The program has been an undeniable success. It has helped reduce child poverty by almost 65%, and annual school enrolments have risen by an average of 25%.

[http://www.preal.org/Biblioteca.asp?Id_Carpeta=109&Camino=319|Programas/321|Buenas%20Prácticas/104|Buenas%20Prácticas%20Política%20Educativa%20y%20Reforma%20Educativa/105|Experiencias%20registradas%20según%20eje%20temático/109|Aumento%20de%20la%20Equidad], consulted July 15, 2009.

⁴² Op. cit. RED DE INNOVACIONES EDUCATIVAS PARA AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE.

⁴³ INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE. *Progres México: Rompiendo el Ciclo de la Pobreza*. Washington, 2002, p. 3 [www.ifpri.org/spanish/pubs/ib/ib6sp.pdf].

⁴⁴ THE WORLD BANK. *Shanghai Poverty Conference: "Case Study Summary – Mexico's Oportunidades Program"* [<http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/reducingpoverty/case/119/summary/Mexico-opportunidades%20Summary.pdf>], consulted July 15, 2009.

⁴⁵ See Appendix III for the amounts granted to participating families.

It is worth noting that there are other programs where at least one objective is to provide financial and/or technical support for local initiatives that fight school dropout. Examples include the *Stay-in-School Initiative* in Canada, the *School Dropout Prevention Program* in the US and the *Liceo para todos* program in Chile.

6. School Dropout in Québec

6.1. Current State of Affairs in Québec

In Québec, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) typically uses the dropout rate at a given age and the proportion of dropouts among school leavers as its school dropout indicators. The dropout rate in the province for those aged 20 to 24 was 11.9% in 2002–2003 and 2004–2005. Moreover, the proportion of dropouts among school leavers⁴⁶ has been around 25% in recent years (1999–2000 to 2006–2007). According to the 2006–2007 report by Groupe d'action sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires au Québec, only 69% of young Quebecers had completed a high school education before their 20th birthday⁴⁷.

It is nonetheless interesting to compare the data according to different types of indicators. For example, in 2006, 87% of Québec's total population had completed a high school education. Taking into account the two indicators already mentioned, this fact reveals another undeniable reality with regard to education in Québec: the phenomenon of “drop-ins” or school returners. The difference between the percentage of graduates under age 20 and the total percentage of graduates in Québec shows that returning to school is a reality that must be considered in our analysis. This situation may be explained in part by the overall flexibility of the Québec school system, a system which provides adult education characterized by individualized instruction and support for students. Fortunately, then, school dropout is a reversible phenomenon in the life of a student.

At the international level, in 2007 the percentage of the Québec population that had graduated from high school was higher than the overall average obtained by OECD countries. Québec outperformed the United Kingdom, the United States and Sweden, but scored lower than frontrunners Germany, Finland, Greece and Japan⁴⁸.

6.2. Initiatives to Fight School Dropout in Québec

6.2.1. The New Approaches, New Solutions Intervention Strategy⁴⁹

This strategy aims to break the dropout cycle and protect young people in disadvantaged areas from the adverse socio-economic conditions they face. In 2007–2008, the strategy involved around one third of public-sector primary and secondary students. A number of aspects stand

⁴⁶ “School leavers”, or students who leave secondary school, include 1) students who obtain a diploma or qualification during the year concerned and 2) students who leave without a diploma or qualification.

⁴⁷ J. Ménard. *Savoir pour pouvoir : entreprendre un chantier national pour la persévérance scolaire*. Groupe d'action sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires au Québec, 2009, p. 9
[<http://www.perseverancescolaire.com/details.php?idNouvelle=10>].

⁴⁸ Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. *Education Indicators–2010 edition* 2010, pp. 102–103
http://mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/publications/publications/SICA/DRSI_Indicateurs_Education_2010_a.pdf, consulted May 30, 2012.

⁴⁹ MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT. *Education Indicators–2010 edition, Fostering Success for Secondary School Students in Disadvantaged Areas*. Gouvernement du Québec, Québec, 2002
[<http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/Agirautrement/agir.pdf>].

out in this program. First, schools must prepare an initial assessment of their situation and develop a corresponding success plan that brings together stakeholders in the educational community (parents, teachers, members of the surrounding community, etc.). Public resources are then allocated to educational institutions based on need. The strategy provides for rigorous and ongoing evaluation.

A team of researchers has begun evaluating this intervention strategy. Preliminary data on success rates in previous years suggest that there is no significant statistical difference between schools where the strategy was deployed and other pilot schools. A final report is anticipated, however, as the research team intends to more accurately measure the results in schools where the strategy worked best⁵⁰.

6.2.2. Supporting Montréal Schools Program⁵¹

This program is mainly geared to Montréal students who live in disadvantaged areas or come from immigrant families and who show low success rates. It seeks to promote a gradual and steady learning process that takes their characteristics and needs into account, thus ensuring successful learning for as many as possible. The program currently supports nearly 140 primary schools.

Results for the program appear to be positive. Follow-up on the progress of two student cohorts (1998–1999 and 1999–2000) over a seven-year period revealed that the initiative positively impacted the performance of participating students in Montréal’s disadvantaged schools. Seven years later, they are less behind than students in disadvantaged schools in Québec overall.

6.2.3. Other Initiatives

A number of other government programs are geared to specific clientele, aspects or means in order to promote educational success. Examples include the **Homework Assistance Program**⁵² and the **Wellness-Oriented School Program**⁵³, which respectively aim to increase students’ motivation to complete school work and improve their performance through exercise and a healthy diet. A portion of the Homework Assistance Program budget was allocated to the *Allô Prof* Program, which provides assistance to elementary and secondary school students via phone and Internet.

Another course of action to ensure school retention and success—and thus prevent dropout—is to fund research on these issues. MELS has been doing this since 2002. To date, more than 85 projects have been financed under the **Research Program on Student Retention and Academic Success**⁵⁴.

Lastly, a number of regional initiatives aim to promote partnerships between political, social and economic stakeholders with a view to achieving student success. These initiatives include the **Conseil régional de prévention de l'abandon scolaire du Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean**

⁵⁰ C. CAUCHY. “Échec de la lutte contre le décrochage”, *Le Devoir*, July 9, 2009, cover page and p. A8.

⁵¹ MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT. Supporting Montréal Schools Program [http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/ecolemontrealaise/index.htm], consulted July 9, 2009.

⁵² MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT. Homework Assistance Program [http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/aidedevoirs/index_en.asp], consulted July 31, 2009.

⁵³ MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT. Wellness-Oriented School Program [http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/ecolesformesante/index_en.asp], consulted May 30, 2012.

⁵⁴ MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION, DU LOISIR ET DU SPORT. Programme de recherche sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaires [http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/PRPRS/], consulted July 9, 2009.

(CREPAS). This initiative has undoubtedly contributed to the outstanding results in this region, which boasts the lowest rate of students leaving school without a diploma or qualification in Québec (18% in 2006–2007) and one of the best graduation rates, whereas in 1996, before CREPAS, the region had average rates compared to the rest of the province.

7. Conclusion

This document does not claim to provide an exhaustive picture of school dropout in the Americas. It is nonetheless clear that school dropout is a challenge facing all governments in the region. COPA parliamentarians can contribute to tackling this challenge through their role as legislators. They can ensure, among other things, that the necessary budgets are granted for the fight against school dropout, that programs are consistently evaluated and that education legislation respects the right of individuals to a quality education that promotes equity and focuses on learning achievement.

It should also be noted that the causes of school dropout vary from country to country. In Argentina and Costa Rica, to take but two examples, socio-economic conditions are a particularly strong factor. Families are sometimes constrained to remove their children from school not by choice but by economic necessity. Thus, financial assistance programs conditional on student attendance have been extremely effective in some countries. On the other hand, in Québec, it would seem that school and family factors have a greater impact. Some situations that contribute to school dropout, such as when the family accords little importance to education or does not inculcate the habit of reading and writing, may lie outside the control and influence of the State. In this context, the government may wish to provide more flexible educational options in order to encourage students to return to school.

Yet there is no doubt that the school environment plays an important role, for it must encourage students' motivation and personal commitment with regard to their studies. One way of doing this, and thereby of curbing school dropout, is to make school life more interesting, in particular by diversifying school activities to include some that are not purely academic in nature. By implementing public policies that improve extracurricular activities, foster educational options which are better adapted and more diversified, and encourage students to identify with their school, governments can have a positive effect on school dropout rates.

It should also be noted that an analysis of school dropout data permits us to observe the phenomenon in its various ramifications and complexity, partly because it is often expressible in terms of certain dichotomies: rural/urban, boy/girl, indigenous/non-indigenous, immigrant/native. It therefore makes sense to adjust public policies in keeping with these particularities. Oversimplifying and overgeneralizing our understanding of the problem can lead to less than positive results. Hence, in considering the case of indigenous peoples, for example, we may affirm that the programs and measures potentially applicable to this group must be specific to it and must therefore be designed to respond to specific problems. The language of instruction and the learning style are often closely linked to the cultural and linguistic traits of a given minority group.

Governments need to understand the complexity of the problem of school dropout before they begin to introduce programs and measures. Taking the opinion of students into account, by means of polls or questionnaires, is a practice that deserves attention. By becoming acquainted with the range of reasons students give for dropping out, we will be better able to target public

policies toward specific goals, thus making such policies more effective and more conducive to the goal of reducing school dropout.

Finally, it should be noted that if governments adopt education as their number one priority, more resources will be accorded to it. Costa Rica's earmarking of a set percentage of its GDP for education is a worthwhile and permanent initiative. Since 2002, Argentina has been spending an increasingly large percentage of its GDP on education⁵⁵. The relative importance a society attaches to education is in itself a structurally efficient response to the problem of school dropout and to the overall improvement in that society's standard of living.

7.1. Mobilizing Parliamentarians in the Fight Against School Dropout

In their role as legislators, parliamentarians have a number of means at their disposal to help fight school dropout in the Americas. Here are three recommendations:

1. **Ensure** that the governments of the Americas implement policies to follow up on their commitments with regard to school dropout. Parliaments and parliamentarians have a decisive role to play in putting pressure on their governments so that measures, programs and policies are implemented to better fight school dropout.
2. **Ensure** that the information in this report is widely circulated, so that other legislators and government members may be inspired in their search for solutions. The range of measures proposed in the report constitutes an undeniable point of reference for efficient and pertinent public policies that will ultimately increase school retention.
3. **Ensure** that school dropout is a parliamentary priority and **pledge** to intervene with the presiding officers of the legislative assemblies so that the issue of school dropout remains on the political agenda.

⁵⁵ See graph, Appendix IV.