



Dominican Republic

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Inclusive Education: A Commitment by All

The Dominican education system seeks to provide quality and equity in Inclusive Education to all individuals living in our country, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, political or religious beliefs, and social or personal condition, laying special emphasis on the populations traditionally at risk of exclusion.

The realization of this objective implies a socio-cultural paradigm aimed at building an inclusive national society, as well as a shift in the educational paradigm, in order to serve as a pillar for an inclusive culture throughout our national life, among other basic purposes.

The legal framework and the policy governing Dominican education are consistent with the philosophy and principles of inclusive education, driven by the political will of the Dominican government.

In 2005, the President of the Dominican Republic, Dr. Leonel Fernández, launched the Presidential Forum on Excellence in Dominican Education. This thorough consultation process culminated in 2007 with the convening of a Forum-related National Congress which in its General Statement set forth a National Agreement to provide quality and equity in inclusive education, leading therefore to the drafting of the 2008-2018 Ten-Year Education Plan.

This Ten-Year Plan was drafted with the active participation of the different key players from the Dominican Society and the State. As a result of the dialogue and the national consensus, ten General Policies were agreed upon to become the Educational Policy of the State. One of their basic principles is to approach Inclusive Education as a means to further inclusion across Dominican Society. A particularity of the Plan is that representatives of civil society and the State will be part of its implementation and evaluation.

During the last years our country made significant progress towards the inclusion of all children, boys and girls alike, in particular in remote rural areas and urban sectors with a high-poverty level, through the design of clear-cut policies benefiting the most disadvantaged sectors, and aimed at improving efficiency within the school system. Starting from the Primary level and with a view to achieving the goals of the Millennium and those of Education for All, a series of programs has been developed, both focalized and of national coverage, contributing to the inclusion and survival in school of children at risk. Among these programs are the following: Programa Nacional de Lectura, Escritura y Matemática (Reading, Writing

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and Math Program); Escuela Multigrado (Multigrade School); Proyecto de Apoyo a la Calidad Educativa-PACE (Educational Quality Support Project), Programa de Atención a la Sobreedad Educativa (Over-age Students Program).

Among the early experimental projects focusing on the development of inclusive practices in Dominican schools are those implemented by the Directorate for Special Needs Education together with UNESCO through the Project for the Development of Inclusive Schools, as well as other experiences in six educational centers, along the border with Haiti. These experiences demonstrated the importance of continuing accompaniment for teachers and school directors as well as the ways in which the conception, values, and attitudes towards inclusion should be approached in all schools across the country in order to ensure significant change in the teaching practice.

Another focused experiment conducted in our country, initially with the support of the Spanish cooperation, is a program calling for a greater attention to be paid to the diversity and broadening of services in special needs education (Programa de Fortalecimiento de la Atención a la Diversidad y Ampliación de los Servicios de Educación Especial (PADEE). This program was initiated in 2004 so as to ensure -in a context of equity and quality –access to and survival in school for children with special educational needs. Therefore strengthening the inclusion process in regular education, while improving and expanding special education services in order to enable the school-age population with severe disabilities or developmental impairments to receive quality inclusive education. The creation of the Centros de Recursos para la Atención a la Diversidad-CAD (Centers for Resources on Attention to Diversity) is one of the components of this program.

The Centers for Resources on Attention to Diversity seek to provide impulse to and strengthen the development of inclusive provision in the country, serving as a system strategy towards the improvement of the quality of Dominican education in order to attend to the special educational needs of schoolchildren in mainstream education. This is provided through support and follow-up as well as information and counseling services to the school community; teacher training; intervention, and psycho-pedagogical support. This project has been viewed by the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Spain (MEC) as a model of Good Practice for the countries of the region.

During the initial phase of the implementation of our 2008-2018 Ten-Year Plan, progress was made towards the commitment to have all 5 year-old children enrolled in the last grade of the preschool level. In a strategic alliance with civil society organizations working in early childhood care, and with the support of international organizations and the State, children under the age of 5, boys and girls alike, are provided with integrated education. We are thriving to provide to 6-14 year-old children, throughout the country and without exclusion whatsoever, a quality primary education that meets national and international standards. To this end, we have developed and launched the Model for Quality Management in Education. We are giving impulse to the consolidation, expansion and diversification of secondary schooling, adult education, and vocational learning with a view to enable more than one million youth and adults to enter, with relative benefits, the labor market and the higher learning level with the combinatory possibilities, efficiency and competitiveness required by this new era.

Our suggestion is that each country of the region should make the social and political commitment to periodically evaluate their public policies on Inclusive Education and to disseminate their outcomes, including the systematization of their good practices. All these information data should become a part of the Inclusive Education Regional Bank, organized by UNESCO/OREALC, entitled to create the necessary mechanisms for articulation with its counterparts in other regions across the international community.