Addressing the Needs of Vulnerable Youth: 
Buenos Aires Second Secondary Education Project

Social Development Best Practice Elements

- Comprehensive poverty diagnosis
- Provisions for participatory monitoring and evaluation

With World Bank support, Argentina has undertaken a systematic program over the past seven years to transform the education system. The Province of Buenos Aires is one of the most advanced in implementing secondary education reform. During the 90s, school attendance significantly improved for ages 15-24 in the province.

Despite this progress, only 24% of low income students complete secondary education. Although the age group 15-24 constitutes 18% of the population, it accounts for 31% of the poor. Youth unemployment is high, especially among those not completing secondary education.

Project Objectives

The Province of Buenos Aires government’s strategy for secondary school education aims to improve equity, quality, and effectiveness. To support these objectives, the provincial Ministry of Education proposed a new program, “Jornada Completa” or “Full Day Schedule” to be introduced in 200 pilot schools. The program will be supported by the World Bank through the Buenos Aires Second Secondary Education project. The pilot program seeks to ensure equity by paying special attention to the quality of education for children “at risk.”

Jornada Completa will increase the number of classroom hours from 800 per year to 1,200 per year and introduce a new pedagogic and curricular model. Extending the school day is also intended to lessen students’ exposure to street violence. The program will support measures designed to make school management more effective and more autonomous. School selection criteria will target those urban lower secondary schools in which most of the student enrollment comes from households that are considered socially and economically disadvantaged and among the poorest. On the basis of the pilot results, the government
intends to gradually extend the Jornada Completa to all secondary schools in high poverty districts or areas.

Social Analysis

A social assessment (SA) was carried out to determine the potential impact of education reform in areas of high poverty and to identify obstacles to implementation. The TOR for the SA was prepared in collaboration with the International Organization of Migration which has considerable expertise in working with grassroots organizations and extensive local experience. It conducted the field work and participated in the debate about the study’s implications for the educational system.

Two groups of five schools each, with similar socio-economic levels, were selected. The Jornada Completa will be implemented in the first group of five schools and not in the second group. In the first phase of the SA, conducted during preparation, focus groups were held with parents, youth from the community who attend and do not attend school, teachers, and school administrators. These stakeholders were interviewed on (i) the concept of Jornada Completa and its usefulness; (ii) perception of the quality of public school education; (iii) perception of the relationship between secondary education and access to the labor market; (iv) factors that will improve the quality of education; (v) perception of the scholarship program and its relation to Jornada Completa; and (vi) opinion on the implementation of education reform.

After one year of implementation, a comparison will be made between the first group and the control group to check the benefits of the program and to monitor progress. Emphasis was placed on the potential impact of the project’s extra-curricular activities for youth, on improving the labor market skills of youth, on leveraging community participation, and on improving the learning process.

Building on Local Capacity

The project also built on local information systems in implementing the project and in monitoring outcomes. The provincial Ministry of Education’s existing database was modified and adapted with their cooperation and the assistance of the SA team. This database (Sistema de Informacion Socio-Educativa) will be maintained by the ministry and will contain information on at least 400 poor lower secondary schools. The 200 schools which will implement the Jornada Completa and the 200 control schools will be selected from these. Selection criteria for the schools incorporated the SA’s results. A school can be included in the project if the percentage of its student population “living in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions” is higher than the district’s average. A poverty composite indicator, based on data from students and their households, includes family residence in slum areas or on illegally occupied land as one of the factors indicating student disadvantage.

Feedback on the project’s impact will be obtained through focus groups and through the educational evaluation system, jointly with the household survey on life conditions. Information from Jornada Completa schools and from the control group will be compared to assess educational progress, and school surveys and interviews will address school performance. The combined methods can track school improvements due to Jornada Completa. Lessons learned from the pilot will aid in the program’s planned expansion and with the design of better institutional mechanisms.