



CaliBaja Moving Forward Together *CaliBaja Avanzando Juntos*

Takeaways from meeting on The Impact of the Border Closure on Binational Students and Current Challenges

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The flow of children and adolescents moving from the U.S. to Mexico has progressively increased from 150 thousand children and adolescents in 1990 to 510 thousand in 2020. It is estimated that, in 2017, 80% of transnational binational students in Tijuana’s middle schools were born and previously studied in southern California. Their migratory journeys are complex and can involve multiple trips back and forth. This is caused by the increase in deportations and the unfavorable conditions to continue living in the U.S. such as high costs.

The characteristics of these children and adolescents vary in terms of nationality, migration status, where their previous schooling took place, and family configurations. Binational students living in Mexico can be classified as follows:

- Binational students: they were born in the U.S. to Mexican parents, so they have the right to dual nationality. Most do not have schooling experience in the U.S. According to Mexican census data, 6% of minors were born in the U.S. and only half of them have dual citizenship.
- Transnational binational students: they study in Mexico, but were born and previously studied in the U.S. They are nearly 20% of the binational students along the Mexican northern border.
- Transborder binational students: they were born in the U.S. and studied or study on the U.S. southern border while they live in Mexico.

The border closure during the pandemic affected binational students in both Mexico and the U.S. In U.S. schools, the students who lived in Mexico and crossed to the U.S. for school continued studying in the U.S. virtually. They tend to be part of mixed families with high levels of cross-border mobility. Others migrated to Mexico but continued studying a U.S. curriculum. In Mexican schools, some of the students who migrated from the U.S. to Mexico enrolled in Mexican public schools, facing great challenges from the government’s homeschooling program (“escuela en casa”). Those with more economic resources enrolled in private schools. Others were left out of both education systems. Furthermore, the border closure resulted in cases of family separation affecting students emotionally and academically. Another factor was the lack of internet access to allow students to continue their education in virtual mode.

There are important barriers to educational continuity for transborder binational students in the Mexican education system. Structural barriers include bureaucratic hurdles to immediately access a school near



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their homes, as well as the difficulties for their families to afford schooling and household expenses. Social barriers include limited family support in education due to family separation and the lack of social networks, the invisibility of binational students in educational and statistical systems, the lack of support for teachers to adapt, and social discrimination. Cultural barriers include differences in terms of curriculum, culture, and school organization between the place of origin and destination, as well as the difficulties for cultural and linguistic integration.

The increasing number of binational students implies great opportunities and challenges for the Mexican and U.S. governments. Opportunities include that there is a large group on both sides of the border of children and adolescents who are potentially bilingual, bicultural, and binational. In addition to the related educational, economic, and social benefits, this can be an opportunity to strengthen cooperative relations between Mexico and the U.S.

The main challenge is that Mexico was unprepared to welcome these students which is why there are no protocols in place to integrate them and they are not considered in national education policy. Educational inclusion must become effective by shortening the time it takes to access schooling, supporting transnational students in their adaptation, and favoring bilingualism and the development of the skills that were left unattended during the pandemic. Additionally, teachers must be trained in intercultural education for migrants that values the cultural capital acquired during migration, applies strategies to build social connections in schools, and adapts the curriculum to prioritize meaningful learning.

Baja California and Morelos are the only states that have taken the initiative to face this phenomenon. Baja California is a sanctuary state that serves 40,000 binational children. The state government of Baja California will include the assistance of binational students as a strategic priority in the state's development plan. It has also developed a bilingual binational school in collaboration with the San Diego County Office of Education. Their goal is that students obtain a double degree from Baja California's Colegio de Bachilleres and California's Global Academy.

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