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**EXCELENCIA Quarterly Report**  
**October 1, 2007 – December 31, 2007**



Submitted by:

**American Institutes for Research**

With:

**Academy for Educational Development**  
**Save the Children Federation, USA**

U.S. Agency for International Development  
Cooperative Agreement No. GDG-A-00-03-00006-00

## SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Title of Project: Expansion of Centers of Excellence in Nicaragua with Emphasis on the APA Methodology (EXCELENCIA)

Main Contractor: American Institutes for Research (AIR)

Associates: Academy for Educational Development (AED)  
Save the Children Federation USA

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Official Contact For the Contractor: Markus Broer  
Project Manager  
1000 Thomas Jefferson St. NW  
Washington, DC 20007  
Tel. 202 403-5524  
Fax 202 403-5979  
Email: [mbroer@air.org](mailto:mbroer@air.org)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT</i> .....	2
<i>ACRONYMS</i> .....	4
<i>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</i> .....	5
<i>PROJECT ACTIVITIES</i> .....	7
<b>I. RESULT 1: EXPANSION OF THE NETWORK OF EXCELENCIA SCHOOLS THAT APPLY THE APA METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<i>A) School Network Expansion</i> .....	7
<i>B. Training</i> .....	11
<i>C) Expansion Activities in the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions (FADCANIC)</i> .....	12
<i>D) Self-evaluation of EXCELENCIA/USAID Schools (FADCANIC)</i> .....	13
<i>E) Achievements under Result 1</i> .....	13
<b>II. RESULT 2. NEW CURRICULUM BASED ON COMPETENCIES FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION THAT INCLUDES BILINGUAL INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION VALIDATED AND INCORPORATED INTO THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<i>A) National Consultation of the New Curriculum</i> .....	14
<i>C) Production of Materials for Inter-Cultural Bilingual Education</i> .....	15
<i>C) Other</i> .....	16
<i>D) Achievements under Result 2</i> .....	16
<b>III. RESULT 3: LONGITUDINAL STUDIES AND ADDITIONAL RESEARCH TO ASSESS PROJECT IMPACT AND FIELD STUDIES TO SET UP EFFECTIVE CHANNELS TO IMPROVE TRANSITION TO PRIMARY EDUCATION</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<i>A) 2007 Annual Study, Student Assessment</i> .....	16
<i>B) Follow-up to Data Processing and Consolidation for Project Indicators</i> .....	17
<i>C) Transition to Primary Education Experiences Study (Save the Children)</i> .....	18
<i>D) Study on Transition to Secondary Education:</i> .....	19
<i>E) Achievements under Result 3</i> .....	19
<b>IV. RESULT 4: EXPANSION OF THE APA METHODOLOGY TO SUBSIDIZED SCHOOLS (PRIVATELY MANAGED SCHOOLS)</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<i>A) Start-up of Result 4</i> .....	20
<i>B) Public Bid for Proposals Process</i> .....	20
<i>PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER</i> .....	22

## ACRONYMS

<b>AED</b>	Academy for Educational Development
<b>AIR</b>	American Institutes for Research
<b>APA</b>	Learn, Practice, Apply (Aprendo, Practico, Aplico)
<b>BASE</b>	Basic Education and Training Program II
<b>COP</b>	Chief of Party
<b>CTO</b>	Cognizant Technical Officer
<b>EQUIP</b>	Education Quality Improvement Program
<b>EXCELENCIA</b>	Expansion of the Excellence Centers in Nicaragua with Emphasis on the APA (Learn, Practice and Apply) Methodology
<b>MINED</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>PRONICASS</b>	Nicaraguan Support to the Social Sector Program
<b>SO</b>	Strategic Objective
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>RAAN</b>	Autonomous Region of the North Atlantic
<b>RAAS</b>	Autonomous Region of the South Atlantic
<b>IBE</b>	Bilingual Intercultural Education
<b>FADCANIC</b>	Foundation for the Autonomy and Development of the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During this quarter, the Project continued to work with the Ministry of Education (MINED) on the National Consultation process involving the new curriculum. This is the first time that an educational curriculum has been reviewed so extensively in Nicaragua, and the different sectors of the population that were consulted are satisfied to have had the opportunity to participate. During the final meeting of the year with all MINED directors, the Minister of Education said that the National Consultation of the new curriculum was the most prestigious activity undertaken by the Ministry in 2007 according to public opinion. He recognized USAID's contributions, as well as those of EXCELENCIA, to the successful development of this activity. The Project's technical team worked closely with the MINED Curricular Transformation Directorate in order to perform the technical assistance needed for this job. A total of 21 short-term consultants were contracted to visit the schools and consult with directors, school principals, teachers, and parents, as well as to assist MINED with the development of the public forums. A representative of EXCELENCIA/USAID participated in the National Commission of the Curriculum in order to ensure that the goals of the project will continue to be taken into account.

The Project incorporated 57 new schools into the network this quarter, for a total of 1,762. The emphasis this quarter was to strengthen the schools that have already been incorporated through facilitator visits and a self-evaluation process. This self-evaluation has helped the technical team to target and analyze specific areas that the schools identified for reinforcement.

Also during this quarter, academic performance tests in Spanish and mathematics were administered to third grade students in a sample of 62 schools, the majority of which participated in the new curriculum validation process. These test results will establish the performance baseline for third grade students in reading and mathematics. They will also offer criteria for reviewing the curriculum and may provide useful information on weaknesses and strength in the current implementation. The assessments will be an important contribution from EXCELENCIA/USAID to process of improving education quality in primary schools in Nicaragua.

Once the expansion was officially signed, the Project started organizing a new component, Result 4, which will expand the APA method to 300 new privately managed schools through subcontracts with NGOs devoted to improve educational quality in Nicaragua. The Project identified and selected the personnel who will work on this new component, rented and equipped the new office space, and started the bidding process for NGOs interested in participating in the subcontracts.

FADCANIC continued its activities on the Caribbean Coast. Some of the activities were affected by Hurricane Felix and its aftermath, which destroyed some of the EXCELENCIA/USAID schools. FADCANIC finished the production of IBE materials for third and fourth multigrade schools, and received a modification from AIR to continue with IBE material production for fifth and sixth grades.

Save the Children continued its training activities for teachers, parents, and the community as it set forth on its proposal for successful transition to primary education. SAVE continued providing pedagogical assistance in classrooms of schools

participating in its study. Save the Children also submitted a proposal to AIR for training EXCELENCIA and NGO technical staff on using the methodology it is developing for the successful transition to primary education.

As part of the evaluation component, EXCELENCIA/USAID continued implementing its information system to: a) follow up on its result-based indicators obtained from the expansion to new schools and USAID education indicators, and b) develop studies on those variables that influence the education quality in network schools.

The third issue of the EXCELENCIA/USAID information bulletin was published.



## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### ***I. Result 1: Expansion of the network of EXCELENCIA schools that apply the APA Methodology***

#### **A) School Network Expansion**

During the fourth quarter of 2007, the EXCELENCIA/USAID team incorporated a total of 57 new schools into the network, resulting in a total of 1,762 participating school centers. This represents an additional 1,122 schools over the number of schools represented at the beginning of the project (640). In a similar manner, the project started 2007 with a presence in 144 municipalities, and during this quarter has expanded to 149 municipalities (97 % of the total number of 153 municipalities in the country).

*Table 1: Schools served by EXCELENCIA/USAID by quarter and category as of Dec 2007*

Schools Served by EXCELENCIA by Quarter and Category								
	Feb 2006	Jun 2006	Sep 2006	Dec 2006	Mar 2007	Jun 2007	Sep 2007	Dec 2007
Mentor Schools	112	184	184	190	232	232	232	232
Satellite Schools	528	526	749	930	899	1327	1473	1,530
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>1,120</b>	<b>1,131</b>	<b>1,559</b>	<b>1,705</b>	<b>1,762</b>

*Source: EXCELENCIA/USAID Project, December 2007.*

Table No. 2 shows the distribution of current EXCELENCIA/USAID network schools by modality and department as of December 2007.

*Table 2: Schools served by EXCELENCIA/USAID by modality and status as of December 2007*

Department	School Type				Status		
	Multi-grade	Multi-grade Bilingual	Regular	Regular Bilingual	Satellite Schools	Mentor Schools	Total
Boaco	55		18		65	8	73
Carazo	56		23		68	11	79
Chinandega	71		48		100	19	119
Chontales	112		23		94	11	135
Estelí	37		29		63	8	71
Granada	52		30		67	15	82
Jinotega	87		28		105	10	115
León	87		35		107	23	130
Madriz	68		18		87	11	98
Managua	44		79		101	25	126
Masaya	38		44		70	12	82
Matagalpa	103		47		141	15	156
Nueva Segovia	81		25		109	12	121
RAAN	16	28	10	19	60	13	73
RAAS	74	4	33	11	138	17	155
Río San Juan	46		17		57	8	65
Rivas	71		38		98	14	112
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1098</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1,530</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>1,762</b>

*Source: EXCELENCIA Project, December 2007*

The graph below tracks the progress of the expansion of the EXCELENCIA network under Result 1. As can be observed from the graph EXCELENCIA is well on target of reaching its expansion goal towards the end of the project.

**Graph 1: Quarterly progress chart - Number of schools served by EXCELENCIA under Result 1.**

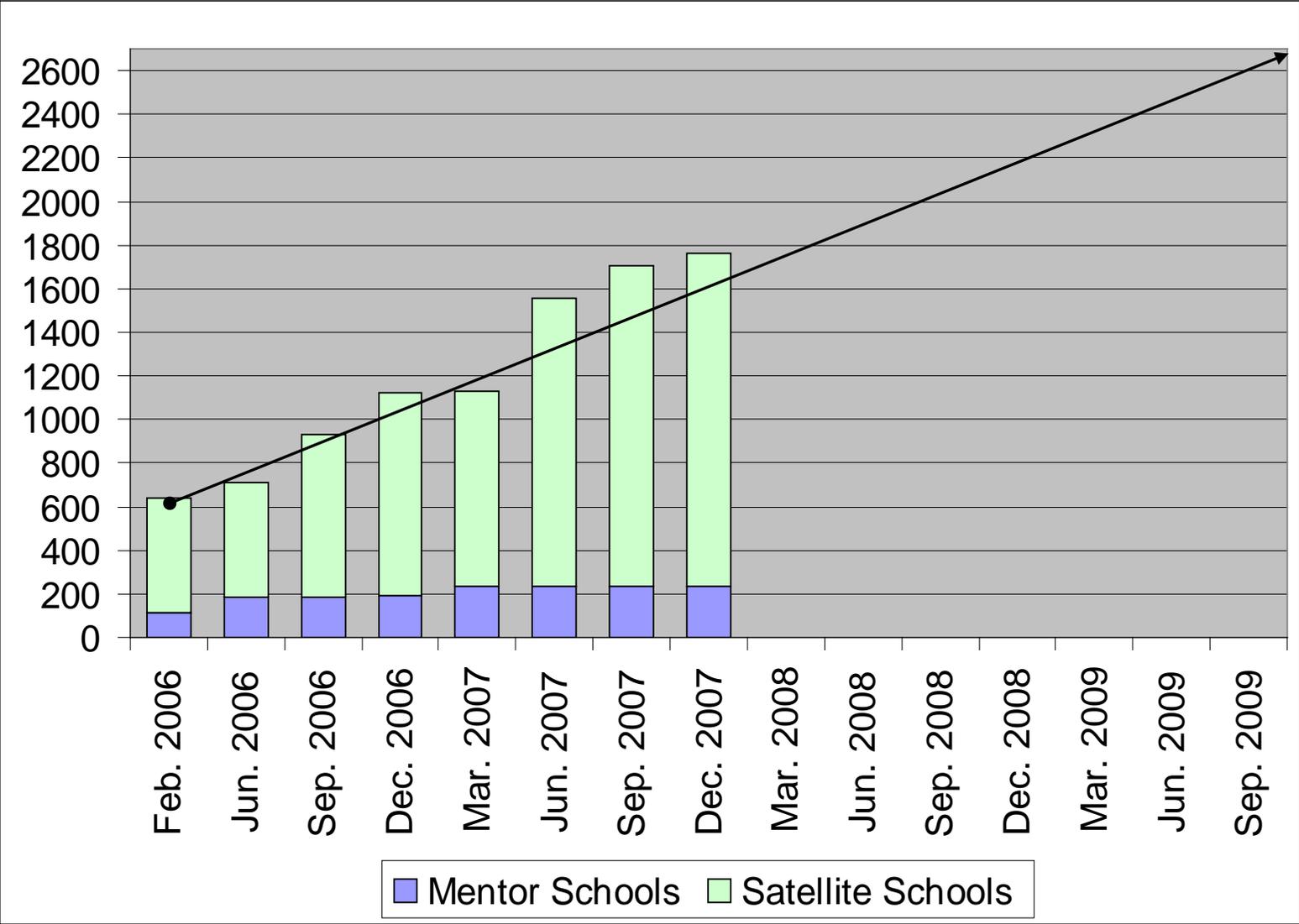


Table No. 3 shows the progress made in the coverage of EXCELENCIA/USAID according to data updated by the MINED Statistics Directorate. By the end of the fourth quarter of 2007, EXCELENCIA/USAID served 20% of the schools and 36% of all primary education students enrolled in the country. In addition, a total of 36% of primary education teachers work in EXCELENCIA/USAID network schools.

*Table 3: The EXCELENCIA/USAID Expansion Status as of December 2007*

<b>EXCELENCIA Project Coverage as of December 2007</b>	
<b>Coverage by Municipality</b>	
Number of municipalities in the country	153
Number of municipalities covered by EXCELENCIA as of December 2007	149
<b>% of municipalities covered by EXCELENCIA as of December 2007</b>	<b>97%</b>
Number of municipalities covered by EXCELENCIA as of December 2007	149
<b>% of municipalities covered by EXCELENCIA as of December 2007</b>	<b>97%</b>
<b>Coverage by schools</b>	
Number of primary education schools (MINED 2007)	8,516
Number of schools served by EXCELENCIA as of December 2007	1,762
<b>% of primary schools served by EXCELENCIA as of December 2007</b>	<b>20.69%</b>
<b>Coverage by student enrollment</b>	
Total of initial enrollment in primary education 2007	950,035
Total of enrollment at EXCELENCIA school as of December 2007	345,246
<b>% of enrollment at EXCELENCIA schools as of December 2007</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Coverage by teacher</b>	
Total number of primary education teachers 2006**	29,030
Number of teachers at EXCELENCIA schools as of December 2007	10,473
<b>% of Teachers at EXCELENCIA schools as of December 2007</b>	<b>36%</b>

\* MINED preliminary data.

\*\* MINED did not conduct a teacher census in 2007, therefore the project used the 2006 teacher census.

Source: MINED Statistics Directorate and EXCELENCIA records. All records as of December 2007.

### Technical Assistance Visits to Schools

In order to achieve the expansion goals, EXCELENCIA/USAID facilitators completed a total of 192 technical assistance and mentoring visits to schools this quarter. School time was shorter this quarter due to the school year ending in December. Table No. 4 shows a break-down of these visits per department.

*Table 4: Number of technical assistance and mentoring visits by department*

<b>Department</b>	<b>Number of Visits</b>
Esteli, Madriz and Nueva Segovia	43
Leon, Chinandega	25
Rivas, Carazo	34
Matagalpa, Jinotega	16
Managua, Boaco	28
Masaya, Granada	26
Río San Juan	20
RAAS (FADCANIC)	79
Chinandega (Save The Children)	19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>290</b>

Source: EXCELENCIA/USAID Project, December 2007.

During this quarter project facilitators were the only individuals conducting school visits because of the replacement of departmental and municipal delegates by the MINED. Each facilitator selected a sample of schools in the region assigned under his/her responsibility to verify the APA application success and to provide assistance on special aspects such as the use of the resource center, student government operations, parents' committees, and other aspects. During school visits facilitators also checked other mentor school activities, some of which are connected to the community participation component. The facilitators made the following conclusions based on these visits, which showed progress made in the application of the approach proposed by EXCELENCIA/USAID:

- The work on reinforcing reading and writing skills in first and second grade students has been well received and applied by teachers, and its impact on students can already be seen. Students proudly show their work in their classrooms, which creates an important pedagogical environment. In most of the schools visited first grade students can write words, complete sentences clearly, and read the instructions in their workbooks well.
- The progress and development shown by student governments and parent committees have varied, depending on each school's characteristics and the interest shown by educational authorities.
- Teachers who participated in the evaluation meeting during each visit were satisfied with the support received from the project as well as with trainings provided. In addition, they requested the project to continue to provide trainings in 2008.

During their visits, facilitators continued presenting the project to new departmental and municipal delegates raising awareness of the schools' achievements. Most delegates appeared to be very interested in continuing their work and in supporting the expansion of project schools. This was also confirmed during higher level planning and evaluation meetings at the MINED. National level authorities visited project schools and saw their work. This, along with the support the project has provided to the National Consultation of the Curriculum, has led to a favorable attitude from educational authorities towards adopt the project's approach and to expand its application. During this quarter, the Minister issued instructions to his team to start working with the project on an institutionalization plan, one of the main emphasis of which would be the introduction of the APA method in the Teacher Training Colleges. Conversations have been initiated with the MINED Teacher Education Directorate to plan this institutionalization in 2008.

### **Coverage of Teachers Working in EXCELENCIA/USAID Network Schools**

As of December 2007, a total of 10,473 teachers (8,406 females and 2,067 males) are working in EXCELENCIA/USAID network schools. This represents 36% of all primary education teachers registered by the MINED.

Please refer to the table on the next page.

Table 5: Number of Teachers at EXCELENCIA/USAID Schools as of December 2007

Department	FEMALE	MALE	Total
Boaco	329	45	374
Carazo	371	81	452
Chinandega	764	122	886
Chontales	422	59	481
Estelí	386	90	476
Granada	464	106	570
Jinotega	509	114	623
León	650	69	719
Madriz	327	102	429
Managua	1,013	288	1,301
Masaya	595	136	731
Matagalpa	721	217	938
Nueva Segovia	472	73	545
RAAN	266	177	443
RAAS	396	248	644
Rio San Juan	220	57	277
Rivas	501	83	584
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,406</b>	<b>2,067</b>	<b>10,473</b>

Source: EXCELENCIA/USAID, December 2007.

## B. Training

Throughout this quarter, training events provided by EXCELENCIA/USAID reached 6,883 people (4,844 females and 2,039 males). On the Pacific Coast trainings have been associated with Consultation Forums for Curriculum Validation where the EXCELENCIA/USAID team has worked in close coordination with the MINED Curricular Transformation Directorate. In addition, teacher trainings about improving the reading and writing abilities of first graders have been reinforced this quarter.

Table 6. Trainings carried out by the project during this quarter

TRAINING PARTICIPANTS October - December 2007 by Event, Gender, and Duration							
Event	Duration						TOTAL
	One Day		Two Days		Three Days		
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Validation and consultation forums for the new curriculum			4,711	1,984			6,695
Third workshop for first grade students	50	17					67
Analysis of classroom observation guide by teachers (Save the Children)	25	2					27
Evaluation workshop at close of school year (Save the Children)	31	11					42
Induction session with teachers and parents from five new satellite schools (FADCANIC/ RAAS)	14	7					21
Workshop on APA application in training guides for emotional recovery issues (FADCANIC/RAAN)					13	18	31
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>4,711</b>	<b>1,984</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>6,883</b>

Source: EXCELENCIA/USAID Project, December 2007

Save the Children continued training teachers from the four experimental schools in Chinandega and expanded the trainings to include MINED pedagogical advisors at their request.

FADCANIC trained teachers and parents from five satellite schools in the RAAS. Given the special circumstances created by Hurricane Felix, which interrupted many activities in the region, FADCANIC conducted a workshop on emotional recovery for students in the RAAN.

### **C) Expansion Activities in the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions (FADCANIC)**

#### ***Expansion Activities:***

EXCELENCIA, through FADCANIC, currently serves a total of 104 schools in the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions. Forty-seven of them were already working with BASE II and to date 57 new schools have been incorporated. Table No. 7 shows the number of schools served per region and type of school.

*Table No. 7. Schools served by EXCELENCIA in the Autonomous North and South Atlantic Regions.*

<b>Region</b>	<b>School Type</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>
	<b>Mentor</b>	<b>Satellite</b>	
RAAN	12	53	65
RAAS	10	29	39
<b>TOTAL</b>	22	82	104

In the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions, FADCANIC has continued implementing an expansion strategy for the APA methodology in schools under its responsibility. Hurricane Felix seriously damaged several of the schools served by FADACANIC and seriously disrupted their normal activities in the RAAN. Consequently, FADCANIC submitted a proposal to EXCELENCIA/USAID for restoring those damaged schools, which AIR then submitted to USAID for consideration.

Out of the 104 schools that EXCELENCIA/USAID serves through FADCANIC, 66 are located in the RAAN. According to the initial diagnosis presented by FADCANIC, 14 of the 66 schools were completely destroyed by Hurricane Felix, 15 were missing roofs, ten suffered partial damages in their structures, and 15 had only minor damages. Adding to the destruction of infrastructure was the loss of school materials (books, files, etc.) and the negative psychological impact on students and their families and community suffered losses of lives and property. Rebuilding these schools is necessary to continue working in the region.

Given that the EXCELENCIA/USAID Cooperative Agreement sets forth some specific quantitative goals of schools to serve, we asked FADCANIC not to reduce the number of schools served but, in spite of the difficult circumstances, provide continued assistance to those schools and present an alternative plan to continue serving damaged schools, according to what is considered most necessary in educational terms and based on regional authorities' plans for current circumstances. FADCANIC has for example

conducted a workshop on emotional recovery for students in the RAAN. The project also continues to receive decisive support from regional authorities.

## **D) Self-evaluation of EXCELENCIA/USAID Schools (FADCANIC)**

A second self-evaluation of project schools, one of the necessary tools for monitoring, was carried out this quarter. Facilitators maintain records of each school under their responsibility which they update continually during their visits with pedagogical advisors. They also promote school self-evaluation as a way to gauge gradual progress and to adjust for any limitations they may see hindering the good performance as EXCELENCIA/USAID network schools. A total of 1,023 schools participated in this second self-evaluation.

The self-evaluation form is filled out by the school principal with help from teachers in the presence of the pedagogical advisor. The idea behind this self-evaluation is a self-reflection exercise about progress made with active schools components and APA methodology application. The evaluation management office is in charge of digitizing, processing, and analyzing the data collected from the self-evaluation, which they then consolidate into a report available on the Internet.

The self-evaluations showed that EXCELENCIA/USAID network schools have the same infrastructure-related limitations as the rest of public schools in the country. Approximately 51% of them do not have potable water and 79% do not have toilets, just latrines. Fifty two percent do not have electricity and only 14% have access to computers.

With regards to the development of pedagogical components, 62% of mentor schools and 49% of satellite schools are considered to be at an intermediate level of their development. Ninety five percent of network schools have been able to establish their student governments and 97% have parental participation at different levels, including support to classroom activities (37% in mentor schools and 22% in satellite schools). Most parent councils and school managing councils meet monthly.

## **E) Achievements under Result 1**

- *The Project has progressed positively in its strategy to institutionalize the methodological proposal in MINED.* MINED has recognized the positive contributions of EXCELENCIA/USAID in regards to the new educational curriculum production and consultation and the operations of network schools as compared to those which are not a part of the network. As a result, MINED authorities have indicated their intention to institutionalize the project's proposal through the teacher training colleges. Year 2008 will definitely be the year to set forth the solid foundation for this institutionalization.

- *EXCELENCIA has incorporated 57 new schools into the network this quarter.* In spite of challenges surrounding the change of authorities in the regions and principals in schools, the hard work of facilitators made it possible to increase the number of schools in the network and to strengthen the work in the 146 schools incorporated last quarter.

- *EXCELENCIA* increased the number of people trained. During this quarter, EXCELENCIA reached 6,883 people (4,883 females and 2,039 males) with its national and local training sessions.

## ***II. Result 2. New Curriculum Based on Competencies for Primary Education that includes Bilingual Intercultural Education validated and incorporated into the National Educational System***

### **A) National Consultation of the New Curriculum**

Within the framework of Result 2 EXCELENCIA/USAID supported MINED in the framework of the National Consultation of the New Curriculum with the realization of consultation forums. The project contracted the forum facilitators and EXCELENCIA technical staff participated in the forums. EXCELENCIA contracted 21 short-term consultants to support MINED in this activity during this quarter.

It is important to highlight that this is the first time in the educational history of Nicaragua that a curricular proposal has been widely consulted with all sectors involved in education at the national level. Teachers, parents, and the educational community in general appreciated being included in the consultations, making the National Consultation of the New Curriculum - in the words of the Minister of Education himself - the activity that brought most prestige to the Ministry in 2007. EXCELENCIA/USAID was the only assistance project which cooperated closely with MINED to support this activity. This support has been publicly recognized by educational authorities in the country.

The primary education curriculum has been prepared and validated for the first time with EXCELENCIA/USAID technical assistance. The contents of this curriculum have been developed following the necessary sequence for their application under the APA (Aprendo, Practico y Aplico) approach and thus its acceptance also means an acceptance of the approach the project has been proposing. The project will continue developing the other active schools characteristics around this approach including community participation and incorporating the specific cultural characteristics and native languages of indigenous communities.

Forums were carried out in all 15 departments where a total of 6,040 people (4,200 females y 1,840 males) participated. The participants showed a high level of participation and acceptance of all curricular documents presented. The teachers expressed that the learning guides proposed by the new curriculum support them in their planning, and they suggested that these practices be expanded to all teachers in the country.

The table below shows dates and places where consultation forums were carried out this quarter:

*Table No. 7. Forums for National Consultation of the New Curriculum*

Department	Execution Period	Number of Places	Participants		
			Female	Male	Total
Jinotega	Oct 29 and 30, 2007	1	272	105	377
Río San Juan	Oct 29 and 30, 2007	1	189	162	351
Chinandega	Oct 15 and 16, 2007	1	267	124	391
Rivas	Oct 18 and 19, 2007	1	313	102	415
Boaco	Oct 25 and 26, 2007	2	273	98	371
Estelí	Oct 22 and 23, 2007	1	308	70	378
RAAS-Zelaya Central	Oct 22 and 23, 2007	1	193	88	281
Nueva Segovia	Oct 22 and 23, 2007	2	230	121	351
Carazo	Oct 18 and 19, 2007	1	374	167	541
Madriz	Oct 22 and 23, 2007	1	227	105	332
Granada	Oct 18 and 19, 2007	2	278	127	405
Masaya	Oct 15 and 16, 2007	1	317	171	488
León	Oct 15 and 16, 2007	1	345	131	476
Chontales	Oct 25 and 26, 2007	3	271	67	338
Matagalpa	Nov 5 and 6, 2007	2	343	202	545
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>4,200</b>	<b>1,840</b>	<b>6,040</b>

*Source: EXCELENCIA/USAID and MINED, December 2007.*

EXCELENCIA/USAID representatives participated as members of the National Curriculum, Secondary Education, and the Teacher Development commissions. In those commissions the project presents its positions on educational issues and contributes its experiences. EXCELENCIA/USAID's participation in these commissions provides the project with access to key decisions to develop national educational policies in the country.

### **C) Production of Materials for Inter-Cultural Bilingual Education**

FADCANIC completed preparing IBE materials for third and fourth multigrade primary schools, and has developed a plan for their validation during the 2008 school year.

Within the framework of EXCELENCIA/USAID funding expansion to support the national consultation of the new curriculum and expand the school network to privately managed schools, FADCANIC will develop IBE materials for fifth and sixth grades during 2008.

## **C) Other**

The Project team worked closely with PRONICASS to calculate the costs associated with implementing the new curriculum, both for the reproduction and distribution of materials as well as costs associated with teacher training on its application in the classroom. The objective of this activity was to offer MINED a cost estimate that allows it to obtain and process the necessary resources from its different funding sources.

## **D) Achievements under Result 2**

- *MINED recognizes EXCELENCIA contributions.* MINED has demonstrated its great appreciation for the project's support for the objectives of the National Consultation of the New Curriculum. EXCELENCIA/USAID is the only project that immediately responded to the Ministry's request to actively participate in the consultation, planning, and implementation of activities with the Curriculum Development Directorate. As a result of this participation, new MINED authorities at all levels, were able to see and feel the project's presence and perceived it as a part of their institution. This high visibility has allowed the project to demonstrate the advantages it offers for achieving MINED objectives and policies and it is creating the foundations for its institutionalization.

- *Material preparation for Intercultural Bilingual Education in the Caribbean Coast Autonomous Regions was completed.* Materials for third and fourth grades multigrade primary education have been completed in all languages and will be validated by FADCANIC during the 2008 school year.

## **III. Result 3: Longitudinal Studies and Additional Research to Assess Project Impact and Field Studies to Set up Effective Channels to Improve Transition to Primary Education**

### **A) 2007 Annual Study, Student Assessment**

It was agreed with the authorities at the MINED that the 2007 Annual Study will focus on establishing a baseline for assessing students' academic performance within the new curriculum framework. The assessment will not only give the project an objective monitoring tool on educational quality, but also provide the MINED with an instrument to evaluate some of the competencies contained in the new curriculum..

The main objective of the 2007 Annual Study was to evaluate academic performance of third grade students in reading and mathematics. At the same time, an analysis of some factors associated with student academic performance will be carried out.

The main tool used in this evaluation is the academic performance tests in reading and mathematics for third grade students. These tests have been developed by local technician experts and teachers, with the technical support of experts from the AIR and in close collaboration with MINED Curriculum and Technological Development General Division.

The tests were administered in November 2007 to a select sample of 62 regular and multi-grade schools, most of which also participated in the new competency-based curriculum validation process. Results from these tests will establish the performance baseline for third grade boys and girls in reading and mathematics. Moreover, the results can be used to identify strength and weaknesses in the implementation of certain competencies in the schools. This will be an important contribution to the process of improving the quality of primary education in Nicaragua.

The process of creating the reading and mathematics item bank was completed. This allowed the development of four forms which were administered to students to pilot a significant number of items from the bank.

The process of developing tools for reading and mathematics tests has strengthened local capacities because the tools have been developed locally with technical assistance provided by the project. It has also incorporated participation from local teachers and experts from all over the country, including the Caribbean Autonomous Regions.

## **B) Follow-up to Data Processing and Consolidation for Project Indicators**

During this quarter the project team continued monitoring project indicators through the processing and consolidation of information from field activities. EXCELENCIA now has a frequently updated database on the number of network schools, their enrollment, and participation in project trainings.

During this quarter, the Project's evaluation component presented the second self-evaluation report to the pedagogical component and the Chief of Party. There is a self-evaluation form that each school principal must fill out with help from teachers from their school in the presence of the pedagogical advisor. This form is meant to promote reflection among the directors, teachers, and advisors who are asked to self-assess themselves with respect to each evaluation theme.

The satellite schools also complete this same process with the help of the director of the mentor school, and the pedagogical advisor assigned to them.

EXCELENCIA facilitators are in charge of implementing this process of reflection, filling out the forms in the schools, and returning them to the evaluation team for processing and analysis. This information is then digitized, processed, and analyzed by the evaluation team. In 2007 the Project completed two analyses that were presented to the pedagogical component in order to motivate reflection among the directors and teachers about the progress of each school.

The Project completed the second round of analysis with information from 1,023 schools in the network. This analysis explains the progress of the pedagogical components in the different sectors of participation in the results section of Result 1.

## C) Transition to Primary Education Experiences Study (Save the Children)

Save the Children activities within the framework of the Education for Transition to Primary Education this quarter included the following:

- Training workshops for teachers, parents, and the school community
- Pedagogical assistance in the classroom to pre-school, first, and second grade teachers
- Preparation of the *The Child's Active Role* module

### 1. Training workshops for teachers, parents, and school community

#### Workshops for teachers:

During this quarter, the Project carried out two training workshops for teachers of the four experimental schools. Also, the workshops were expanded to include MINED new technical staff and pedagogical advisors.

Workshops				
Topic	Participants	Number		
		Female	Male	TOTAL
Analysis of the classroom observation guide which shows progress in the use of active methodologies by teachers	Pre-school, first and second grade teachers from the four experimental schools; education nucleus directors; teachers from the two base schools devoted to provide support in pedagogical assistance	25	2	27
Evaluation workshop at the end of the school year	Pedagogical advisors and municipal and school delegates, parents and community leaders	31	11	42
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>56</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>69</b>

There is a noticeable improvement in classroom practices. Originally, preschool teachers scored 1 out of 3 on the baseline, and currently their average scores are 1.9 out of 3. The work on transition education has been valued and appreciated because student retention at schools has improved by 20%, in relation to the baseline (See July-September 2007 report).

MINED is very interested in the work EXCELENCIA/USAID is conducting in transition education through its subcontract with Save the Children. The document published on "Successful Transition to First Grade, A Key Factor for Early Childhood Development" was distributed by the Primary Education Directorate to the working groups that will develop MINED trainings in different regions prior to the beginning of the 2008 school year.

## **2. Pedagogical Assistance in the Classroom:**

Nineteen pedagogical assistance visits were carried out during this quarter, and first grade classrooms were especially targeted. These visits are carried out with the school nucleus director or sub-director.

## **3. Modules**

The module on “The Child’s Active Role” has been completed. The design and printing of 200 issues will be carried out next quarter.

## **D) Study on Transition to Secondary Education:**

The study on transition to secondary education was submitted to the National Commission on Secondary Education. The Vice Minister of MINED publicly recognized the EXCELENCIA/USAID contribution through this study.

## **E) Achievements under Result 3**

- *Follow up to activities of the Second Annual Study on third grade students’ performance in reading (in Spanish) and mathematics evaluation. This quarter the Project completed the creation of reading and mathematics tests aligned with the new curriculum. These tests were created by national technical advisors with the assistance of technical experts from the Project. Approximately 2,700 third grade children from 62 schools took the tests. The application of these tests will permit measurement of the new components of the curriculum and how they are applied in the classroom. At the same time, it will inform the creation of a baseline of results for third grade students.*
- *In addition to testing the students, the Project obtained responses from directors and teachers of the participating schools about the implementation of the new curriculum, which will provide valuable information to the MINED.*
- *Updating database for Project indicators follow-up.*

The Project database, which monitors project indicators and progress towards achieving the corresponding USAID Strategic Objective, is being systematically updated.

## **IV. Result 4: Expansion of the APA Methodology to Subsidized Schools (privately managed schools)**

At the beginning of this quarter USAID signed a modification with AIR to expand project funds to incorporate 300 privately managed schools into the EXCELENCIA/USAID network. This expansion will be facilitated through sub-grants with non government organizations, religious organizations, or other private organizations which currently manage schools and serve poor populations in (peri-)

urban, rural and indigenous areas. This amendment incorporates a new result (Result 4) to the project.

### **A) Start-up of Result 4**

In order to start the activities for the new result, a new project component was established and the following activities were carried out:

- *Identification and selection of staff for new component:* Several candidates were interviewed and selected for the following positions: Lead NGO coordinator, NGO coordinators/facilitators, M&E, financial, and administrative personnel.
- *Office lease and set up.* After an extensive search in the area, a house close to the project's current main offices was selected. Additionally, the Project negotiated the lease and repairs. The new office was completely equipped and started its operations this quarter.

### **B) Public Bid for Proposals Process**

EXCELENCIA/USAID developed a public bid for proposals for NGOs interested in the sub-grants offered by the new Result 4. This process was guided by the following steps:

- Development of terms of reference for the request for proposals
- Publication of request for letters of interest
- Call for bids, explanation, and delivery of terms of reference to NGOs who responded to call for bids indicating their interest to participate
- Establishment of the selection committee and rules for its operations

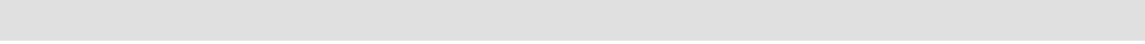
In the first quarter of 2008, the proposal analysis and negotiations with NGOs will start.

Letters of interest were received from each NGO that was present at the terms of reference delivery, 13 in total. In the end, the following eight organizations submitted proposals:

- Vicariato Apostólico de Bluefields (Bluefields Apostolic Vicariate)
- Centro Experimental La Asunción - Fé y Alegría (La Asunción Experimental Center – Fé y Alegría)
- Centro para el Desarrollo Transformador “Nehemías” (Nehemias Center for Transforming Development)
- Fundación ALISTAR de Nicaragua (ALISTAR Foundation of Nicaragua)
- FADCANIC
- Fundación León 2000 (Leon 2000 Foundation)
- Iglesia Morava de Nicaragua (Morava Church of Nicaragua)
- Fundación Enrique Schmidt Cuadra /Ciudad Sandino (Enrique Schmidt Cuadra /Sandino City Foundation)

**Next steps in the selection process:**

The selection committee will analyze the proposals and compare them with the list of proposed schools to ensure that they pertain to the specified category in the terms of reference (privately managed school), and that the school lists presented by the different organizations do not overlap. The committee will also complete a technical and financial analysis of the proposals. Then the committee will begin an initial negotiation with the preliminary selected organizations.



## PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER

- The Project will start executing a strategy to establish the basis for institutionalizing the EXCELENCIA/USAID proposal at MINED. The project will work with its counterparts at the Ministry to develop an initial work proposal with Teacher Training Colleges as a means for institutionalization.
- A MINED resolution on reorganizing teacher training nationwide could affect the project's work plan and goals for these activities. The project's technical team will work closely with MINED technical teams to visit the regions and support teacher training planning.
- Expansion activities will continue as planned with special attention given to training and motivation of new authorities and directors that MINED continues to change.
- The Project will start processing and analyzing the results from the National Consultation of the New Curriculum and will send its corresponding conclusions to MINED.
- IBE materials will be reproduced for their validation in a sample of 50 selected schools.
- The Project will continue the analysis of the information gathered for the 2007 Annual Study on the evaluation of the student performance the third grade level in reading and mathematics with the aim of submitting a complete report of the results in March 2008.
- The Project will administer similar tests in reading and mathematics to third grade students in privately managed schools (Result 4) to establish a baseline.
- Work to incorporate NGOs to work on the new Result 4 will begin. The project will verify their administrative and accounting systems, negotiate changes in the originally submitted proposals, sign sub-awards with suitable NGOs and train their technical staff on the components of the APA methodology. The project will prepare a training program and develop the necessary materials for these activities.