



PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES FOR THE “EVALUATION OF AUTONOMY AND CURRICULAR FLEXIBILITY UNDER THE THEMATIC PROGRAMME ON DEMOGRAPHY, QUALIFICATIONS, AND INCLUSION (PESSOAS 2030)”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. OBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

The subject of this evaluation is the **implementation of Decree-Law No. 55/2018 of 6 July (hereinafter referred to as DL 55/2018), which introduces Autonomy and Curricular Flexibility (ACF) in basic and secondary education in Portugal**. The decree represents a normative instrument that marks a paradigm shift in curricular governance, aiming to promote a logic of contextualized autonomy. Under this model, schools are tasked with managing the curriculum in an integrated and articulated manner, leveraging the Student Profile at the End of Compulsory Schooling (Students Profile), the Essential Learnings (AE), and the National Strategy for Citizenship Education (ENEC) as regulatory tools for pedagogical action.

The evaluation assumes that the flexibility of curricular management—combined with professional development for teachers, the reorganization of learning times and spaces, and strengthened horizontal and vertical articulation—induces organizational and pedagogical transformations. These transformations are expected to yield positive effects on educational success, inclusion, and the development of transversal competencies. The measures outlined in DL 55/2018 aim to ensure the achievement of essential, contextualized, and rigorous learnings, with attention to the diversity of students and school communities.

DL 55/2018 is part of a broader normative and programmatic ecosystem, aligning with: Decree-Law No. 54/2018 on inclusive education, the National Program for the Promotion of School Success (PNPSE), the 21|23 School+ Plan, the Integrated Plans for the Promotion of Educational Success (PIPSE), the National Arts Plan (PNA), the National Reading Plan 2017-2027 (PNL 2027), the School Libraries Network (RBE), among others. It also aligns with European guidelines on competency development, lifelong learning, and equity promotion. These convergences expand its scope and complicate its monitoring.

2. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation **main objective** is to assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and European added value of the measures resulting from the implementation of DL 55/2018. Specifically, it seeks to **understand how schools have appropriated the decree; determine the extent to which it has contributed to changing pedagogical, organizational, and curricular management practices; and investigate its effects on competency development, equity promotion, and inclusion within the education system**.

The evaluation covers all public schools in basic and secondary education, focusing on the period from the 2018/2019 to 2023/2024 academic years. It also considers support mechanisms for implementation, interactions with other public policies, and how Autonomy and Curricular Flexibility (ACF) integrates into the institutional architecture of the Portuguese education system.

3. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation adopts a **mixed-methods, iterative approach**, integrating **quantitative and qualitative methods** through **multiple triangulation**. This design ensures a contextualized and in-depth analysis of change processes, combining empirical evidence from diverse instruments and analytical levels.

Methodological Design includes:

- **Surveys: Teachers** (n=6,425), **school principals** (n=456), and **students** (n=38,117) using statistically representative samples. Collects data on perceptions, practices, and outcomes related to ACF. Supports the identification of patterns and segmentations. Assesses the implementation of Essential Learnings (AE) in school clusters and non-clustered schools, exploring how they have been adopted, challenges faced, and perceived impacts on curricular organization and educational equity.
- **Focus Groups: National ACF Coordination and the five Regional Teams**, along with ACF Representatives from Teacher Training Centres (CFAE), to capture perspectives from intermediate actors and identify implementation patterns and local adjustments. **ACF Representatives at CFAE** to explore perceptions and experiences in continuous teacher training and their role in supporting the implementation of DL 55/2018, particularly regarding ACF and Essential Learnings (AE).

- **Multiple Case Studies (7):** Selected based on criteria proposed by the Directorate-General for Education (DGE), including territorial typology (urban/rural), organizational size, teaching modality, and context [e.g. different teaching cycles, science and humanities courses (CCH), Vocational, Priority Educational Intervention Territories (TEIP)]. Schools were chosen also based on their willingness to host the evaluation team.

Complementary Methods include **Extensive Document Analysis** [Legal frameworks, curricular documents, Innovation Plans, external evaluation reports, school self-assessment reports, and relevant scientific and institutional publications (e.g., National Education Council, OECD)], **Statistical Analysis of Secondary Data** [Data from the Directorate-General for Education and Science Statistics (DGEEC), including time series and comparative data, to analyze trends in results and equity] and an **Interview with Professor João Costa, former Secretary and Minister of Education**, responsible for the launch and implementation of DL 55/2018 (until April 2, 2024) with aim to reconstruct the initial context that led to the design and launch of the decree, gather perceptions on key changes and impacts associated with ACF, and identify major challenges and obstacles—both those overcome and those that persist.

4. RESPONSES TO EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation seeks to answer a broad set of **32 evaluation questions** (EQ), organized across seven major domains: relevance (EQ 1.1 to 1.3), coherence (EQ 2.1 to 2.4), effectiveness (EQ 3.1 to 3.11), efficiency (EQ 4.1), impact (EQ 5.1 to 5.10), sustainability (EQ 6.1 and 6.2), and European added value (EQ 7.1). Below is a summary of the main conclusions derived from the responses to these evaluation questions, organized by their respective domains.

In terms of **relevance**, the evaluation indicates that DL 55/2018 helped create legal and organizational conditions that favor more flexible and tailored curricular options. The Essential Learnings (AE) has been widely adopted as a reference for planning and assessment, valued for clarifying priorities and supporting a curriculum management approach focused on learning.

Although it is recognized that Essential Learnings (AE) enables the development of more complex competencies, the promotion of skills such as critical thinking, autonomy, or active participation appears to be more present in schools where Essential Learnings (AE) is operationalized with practices like Curricular Autonomy Domains (DAC), dialogic gatherings, class assemblies, and project-based work.

The case studies reveal that where there is effective leadership, a culture of innovation, and institutional support (e.g. Priority Educational Intervention Territories (TEIP) schools), implementation is more consistent and innovative. On the other hand, school clusters with more "incipient" experiences tend to demonstrate flexibility only in specific aspects, such as the format of class schedules or more sporadic Curricular Autonomy Domains (DAC) experiences.

Regarding the suitability for age and student characteristics, no mismatches were reported in the formulation of Essential Learnings. The case studies conducted showed that schools are operationalizing strategies for pedagogical appropriation of Essential Learnings (AE) that are adjusted to the age and emotional development of students.

Regarding **coherence**, there is consistent alignment between DL 55/2018, Essential Learnings, and the Student Profile, visible in their integration into schools' structuring documents and pedagogical planning practices. This alignment materializes in practices such as curricular reorganization, the development of interdisciplinary projects, and the strengthening of collaborative work among teachers, with a focus on the implementation of DAC.

It should also be noted that Essential Learnings (AE) is widely recognized as useful and scientifically sound. Training and capacity-building moments, including those focused on Essential Learnings, are particularly valued by the surveyed teachers, and their frequency is associated with a perception of greater rigor and applicability.

This internal coherence is recognized by principals and teachers and is reinforced by the action of the National Coordination and Regional Teams supporting ACF, as well as by training aligned with the principles of the decree. The articulation between Decree-Law No. 55/2018 and Decree-Law No. 54/2018 has driven more inclusive practices, particularly in collaboration among teachers and specialized support. It is observed that the articulation between the two decrees is more consolidated in contexts where there are intermediate leadership structures (such as educational teams) and local collaboration networks (for example, with health services, social protection, or local associations).

Although the collected data reveal specific progress, they also show that the relationship between schools, parents, and the community remains one of the least consolidated domains of ACF. Furthermore, it is noted that the monitoring of inclusion continues to prioritize dimensions such as psychopedagogical support and participation in citizenship projects, suggesting that school practices remain more focused on measuring outcomes than on monitoring the conditions for the full and effective inclusion of all students and the active involvement of the educational community.

Regarding **effectiveness**, transformations in teaching practices, assessment, and pedagogical organization are reported. There are indications of greater methodological diversification, increased collaborative learning, and reorganization of time and teams. Most schools have revised their guiding documents and established educational teams. There is also considerable dissemination of formative assessment, and Essential Learnings (AE) is valued as a tool to support the definition of assessment criteria. The case studies reveal the adoption of innovative organizational structures, such as the creation of Curricular Autonomy Domains (DAC), workshops, tutoring, mentoring, and initiatives like "Espaço Turma" (Classroom Space). There is also progressive integration of specialized human resources—according to surveyed principals, one-fifth of schools have support from specialized non-teaching staff.

However, these transformations are not uniform. Asymmetries have been identified, particularly in interdisciplinary articulation and student-centred approaches. Pedagogical differentiation, active student participation, and curricular alignment remain significant challenges in consolidating teaching practices that align with the new legal framework. Although widely reported by teachers, student involvement in pedagogical decisions and, above all, the adoption of differentiated teaching practices are still little perceived by students, suggesting a gap between intention and practice.

The participation of parents and guardians remains limited and highly dependent on the school context and mediation strategies implemented. Only one-third of schools use indicators of student and parent satisfaction or performance.

Continuous professional development, focused on topics such as assessment, inclusion, and differentiation, is valued, but there is great heterogeneity: more than 35% of teachers have not participated in any training. Simultaneously, constraints persist, such as lack of time, teacher workload, and difficulties in applying training to daily school life.

The Regional Teams, although valued by teachers and principals, do not yet provide systematic and frequent support. To consolidate the effects of training, it is necessary to strengthen regional support mechanisms, promote peer-sharing spaces, and invest in flexible, applicable, and contextualized training formats.

In terms of **efficiency**, data indicate structural and organizational limitations that hinder the full implementation of ACF. Challenges such as time management, teacher shortages, instability in teaching staff, insufficient teaching hours, and heavy teaching loads are cited by principals and teachers as constraints that complicate sustained collaborative work and the consolidation of innovative pedagogical practices.

School-based continuous training is valued, with teachers and principals recognizing its positive impact on curricular planning, peer supervision, and the implementation of active and innovative methodologies. However, the continuity and practical relevance of training are not yet guaranteed, particularly in critical areas such as pedagogical differentiation and formative assessment.

These factors may limit the transformative potential of DL 55/2018, especially in more organizationally complex contexts, such as larger school clusters facing challenges in human resource management and curricular organization, including high teacher turnover, difficulties in scheduling, and geographic dispersion of schools.

The support provided by Regional Teams to schools is valued by principals and teachers, particularly when there is continuity and proximity to the specific needs of each context.

In terms of **impact**, the collected data indicate positive signs regarding student engagement, the development of competencies such as autonomy and collaborative work, and an improved perception of how students learn.

The use of diverse work strategies, such as interdisciplinary projects, debates, class assemblies, and collaborative group work, when applied consistently, is globally perceived as important for strengthening critical thinking, autonomy, and students' sense of belonging. Additionally, there is a generally positive perception of the impact of these changes on student motivation, well-being, sense of belonging, and school cohesion. The increase in relational proximity and the greater student involvement in learning were particularly valued by the surveyed students, who highlighted individualized support (mentoring, tutoring, workshops) and the creation of spaces associated with greater motivation, empathy, and engagement [e.g. "Espaço de Turma" (Classroom Space), "Calmamente" (Calmly), "Ubuntu").

However, the frequency of these practices appears to be irregular and lower, especially in advanced cycles, where the pressure of national exams limits space for participatory approaches. Furthermore, the formal recording of these experiences in school certificates remains residual and unsystematic, suggesting insufficient institutional recognition of these approaches.

On the other hand, core aspects of student-centred approaches, such as differentiation of activities and active participation in task definition, continue to show low occurrence levels, according to the students themselves. There is a discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions, as only a minority of students recognize regularly experiencing these methodologies and dynamics of participation and more active involvement in the school context, suggesting a lack of consistency or clarity in the intentionality of practices.

The contribution to equity is considered moderate by the surveyed principals and teachers. While consistent practices are identified in some contexts (e.g. co-teaching, collaborative work), obstacles persist, such as disciplinary issues, lack of resources, and teacher instability.

Simultaneously, systematic mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating inequalities in schools, particularly among vulnerable groups, remain insufficient.

The positive evolution in retention and dropout rates suggests the effectiveness of curricular changes, although it is not possible to establish a direct correlation or causal relationship between the implementation of DL 55/2018 and academic results.

In terms of **sustainability**, it was concluded that consolidation depends on stable organizational conditions: stability of teaching teams, time for planning, and adequate resources. The sustainability of ACF will also be associated with its institutional valorisation within the framework of educational policy and the capacity of schools to integrate it as a regular practice rather than an episodic one.

Furthermore, for a more complete and rigorous analysis of the medium and long-term sustainability of the introduced changes, it is important to improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms by introducing additional indicators, particularly qualitative ones. Surveyed teachers and principals note that the currently used quantitative indicators, which focus mainly on retention and dropout rates, do not allow for an effective understanding of qualitative transformation dynamics and pedagogical innovation, nor the quality of collaborative work. They propose, as an alternative, approaches that enable result triangulation, through a quantitative analysis of student outcomes, combined with interviews with teachers and focus groups with students, parents, and guardians.

Regarding **European Added Value**, although DL 55/2018 is not the result of a European measure, its implementation has significantly benefited from European support, particularly through co-financing from the POCH (Human Capital Operational Programme). This support materialized in the establishment of Regional Support Teams, enhanced continuous training for teachers and principals, and institutional capacity-building actions. These European-funded support instruments proved relevant for policy dissemination, consolidation of organizational changes, and intervention coherence.

Although European frameworks are not explicitly mobilized by schools as direct guidelines, the autonomy and curricular flexibility model is aligned with the structuring principles of European education policies, such as equity, inclusion, and the development of key competencies.

5. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

A first general conclusion to highlight is the **overwhelmingly positive assessment of the impact of DL 55/2018 on pedagogical practices, evaluative practices, and school organizational models**. This highly positive assessment was gathered through questionnaire surveys administered to principals, teachers, and students, and was further reinforced by direct consultations with various stakeholders [principals, teachers, students, parents and guardians, the ACF National Coordination, ACF Regional Teams, and ACF Representatives in Teacher Training Centres (CFAE)] through case studies, interviews, and focus groups.

The collected evidence allows us to conclude that **DL 55/2018, as an educational policy measure, created generally favourable conditions and contributed to the gradual institutionalization of more student-centred, collaborative, and equity-oriented pedagogical practices**. However, significantly differentiated dynamics of appropriation were identified, reflecting, at times cumulatively, important asymmetries (i) between school clusters and non-clustered schools and their contexts (territorial and socioeconomic), (ii) between educational cycles, and (iii) between disciplinary areas.

Nevertheless, the persistence of certain significant organizational constraints was identified, such as difficulties in managing and organizing work time allocation, instability of teaching teams, and the need to prepare students for external assessments (particularly in secondary education, with "national exams"), among others. These constraints hinder the consolidation of the changes intended by the Autonomy and Curricular Flexibility (ACF). As observed in the most successful cases, the continuity and deepening of the implementation of DL 55/2018 seem to depend on maintaining favourable organizational conditions and valuing structures that support educational innovation, including in the areas of training, monitoring, and evaluation.

In a comprehensive and integrated reading of the analysis results, it can be concluded that **DL 55/2018 created legal and organizational conditions for autonomy** through the adoption of flexible curricular practices, showing good appropriation by school clusters and non-clustered schools of the main devices introduced by the decree, including Essential Learnings, flexible curriculum management, and Curricular Autonomy Domains (DAC). However, there is heterogeneity, as these devices are not always used in their entirety, and when they are, they do not always exhibit the same levels of intensity, depth, or intentionality.

The adoption of Essential Learnings (AE) is one of the strongest mechanisms for curricular refocusing, a fact recognized by most of the surveyed teachers and principals, who emphasize that it allows for clarifying teaching objectives, selecting content, and simplifying planning, thereby contributing to the consolidation of learning and the development of complex competencies, such as critical thinking, autonomy, collaboration, and active participation.

However, teachers' appropriation of Essential Learnings (AE) takes different forms, with four distinct appropriation profiles identified (advocates, pragmatists, forced adopters, and sceptics). Scepticism among teachers is prevalent, especially among those who work more in isolation, highlighting the persistence of resistance in schools associated not only with a lack of collaborative culture among teachers but also with other organizational aspects that hinder the full implementation of Essential Learnings.

Other factors pointed out as obstacles to the full adoption of Essential Learnings (AE) include difficulties in finding available time for joint planning and interdisciplinary work, as well as gaps in teacher training and professional development. Through the teachers' survey responses, some difficulties were identified in the analysis and operationalization of Essential Learnings (AE), particularly regarding their scope in specific recruitment groups—such as Geography (420), Physics and Chemistry (510), Mathematics (500), Philosophy (410), Mathematics and Natural Sciences (230), and Basic Education—1st Cycle and Portuguese and English (220). Additionally, challenges were reported in the practical application of Essential Learnings (AE) in recruitment groups like Visual and Technological Education (240), Geography (420), and Computer Science (550).

The reorganization of school time (into trimesters or semesters, for example) is also a clear sign of the appropriation of organizational and curricular management possibilities. However, according to the teacher survey data, the number of schools that have adopted more expressive combinations of curricular components is still limited, indicating a dominant trend towards selective flexibility, confined to certain areas, classes, or moments of the school year. Beyond the differences associated with different educational cycles and the specificities of some disciplinary areas, the heterogeneity of situations between school clusters and non-clustered schools also appears to be

associated with the size of the schools, as well as the leadership profile of school management and the culture of innovation they seek to promote, along with the set of supports provided to teachers (time, specialized human resources, training, etc.).

Regarding the transformations in pedagogical and evaluative practices driven by DL 55/2018, a positive evolution is observed, particularly through an intensification of the incorporation of active methodologies, cooperative learning, and practical work. Most of the surveyed teachers state that they frequently use diverse materials and regularly promote collaborative learning. This trend is more visible in the 1st and 2nd cycles of basic education and in vocational education, reflecting institutional dynamics that favour innovation, but tends to decrease in the 3rd cycle of basic education and, more markedly, in secondary education, reflecting the pressure associated with "national exams."

However, other practices envisioned within the ACF framework, such as interdisciplinary work and articulation between cycles, remain infrequent. Only a quarter of the surveyed principals positively evaluate the significant evolution of interdisciplinary articulation. Although most of the surveyed teachers claim to do so regularly, these practices are still little recognized among the surveyed students. The scarcity of time and the turnover of teaching teams are limiting factors for greater diversification of pedagogical practices, frequently mentioned by the surveyed and interviewed teachers. The persistence of uniform pedagogical practices is also reported by most of the surveyed students. The articulation between teachers of different disciplines also appears to be equally underdeveloped from the students' perspective, with less than 10% of respondents stating that they frequently or always have classes with more than one teacher simultaneously. Generally, it was possible to conclude that, despite the time constraints frequently pointed out by the surveyed teachers, there seems to be greater investment in planning and articulation work among teachers, although the classroom space persists as the domain of the teacher.

The transformation of pedagogical practices driven by DL 55/2018 has contributed to the strengthening of student competencies, such as autonomy, self-regulation, and collaboration. Most of the surveyed students indicate that they can organize their work autonomously, recognize improvements in their ability to work in groups, and, although to a lesser extent, state that they have learned better through the developed activities. Furthermore, from an equity perspective, the ACF framework, articulated with AE, shows potential to mitigate inequalities, especially through curricular flexibility and the valorisation of formative assessment.

However, the data suggest a still weak appropriation, at least from the students' perspective, of the principles of pedagogical differentiation and active student participation. Indeed, only a very small percentage (less than 10%) of the surveyed students reported frequently engaging in different activities from their peers, proposed by themselves. This data contrasts with the teachers' perception, among whom differentiation is widely referred to as a structuring practice. Overall, this perception gap between teachers and students points to the persistence of more uniform practices, which limits the effective implementation of a truly student-centred approach, although it is important to mention that there are specificities associated with school management and the context in which each school is integrated, as well as the heterogeneous way in which the appropriation of new pedagogical practices driven by DL 55/2018 is carried out by teachers from different disciplinary areas and in different educational cycles. Nevertheless, the heavy workload, the scarcity of human resources, and, to a lesser extent, the lack of training seems to constitute the main obstacles to the generalization of the most innovative practices, especially in the more advanced cycles.

The assessment of learning is the domain in which the effects of the implementation of DL 55/2018 are most evident. In the opinion of most of the surveyed teachers, the decree has allowed or greatly promoted formative assessment. On the other hand, about half of the surveyed students recognize that final grades no longer depend exclusively on tests. Practices such as feedback, the use of portfolios, rubrics, and self-assessment are more widespread, although their intensity varies between contexts, educational cycles, and disciplinary areas.

However, despite this generally positive evolution, difficulties persist in articulating innovative evaluative practices with formal certification mechanisms, especially in levels subject to external assessments (notably secondary education, with national exams). Training in learning assessment is still considered necessary for better implementation of DL 55/2018 by most of the surveyed principals.

From an organizational and school management perspective, **the impact of DL 55/2018 on the reorganization of pedagogical work is evident**. More than half of the surveyed principals report that schools have created educational teams and invested in reviewing structuring documents: adjusting assessment criteria and reformulating the Annual Activity Plan. There is also the implementation of new forms of reorganizing school time (e.g. semesters). The culture of collaborative work among teachers is in the consolidation phase, with collected evidence pointing to a generalization of lesson planning practices.

However, **the existence of specific meeting and sharing times is still not universal across all school clusters and non-clustered schools**, often depending on the conditions created by school management and intermediate leadership. For example, in some of the schools visited in the context of case studies, teaching credit hours are managed to reinforce the meeting time of educational teams and support peer supervision practices; in other schools, however, it was reported that the available time for these working meetings is insufficient or requires these tasks to be performed by teachers outside school hours.

Regarding the strengthening of **family participation in school life**, it was concluded that **this remains, in general, very limited**, although some positive signs of change have been identified. Indeed, despite some case studies having revealed good examples of dynamism and active involvement of parents' associations in school life, most of the surveyed principals consider that the participation of parents and guardians is still scarce.

Regarding the **intervention and participation of students in curricular decisions, involving themselves in the planning and implementation of the curriculum itself**, one of the domains of transformation driven by DL 55/2018, the collected data reveal that, in general, this **remains limited**, although it has been possible to identify, namely in the case studies carried out, some positive signs of change. Indeed, relevant progress has been recorded in the increasing involvement of students in pedagogical decisions, such as class assemblies, dialogic gatherings, debates on assessment criteria, projects, etc.

However, **active listening to students proves to be intermittent, still occurring sporadically and not being carried out systematically and recurrently**: 1 in 5 students states they have never been consulted by teachers on what they thought of the activities carried out and how these helped them learn; and more than 30% of the surveyed students report they have never been asked to help plan activities or tasks related to classes. On the other hand, there is still significant room for improvement in monitoring practices, as only about one-third of schools use indicators of student and parent satisfaction or performance.

In summary, **the implementation process of DL 55/2018 was conditioned by a diverse set of factors**.

As **positive factors**, the following stand out:

- I. The proactive role played by the Regional Teams and the ACF Representatives in the Teacher Training Centres (CFAE), whose close work with schools proved essential for the appropriation of the new legal framework and the set of organizational, didactic, and pedagogical challenges it contains.
- II. The approach of the Teacher Training Centres (CFAE) to schools, initially very focused on leadership but gradually expanding to all teachers, has allowed for improving the mechanisms for listening to their concrete needs, thus adjusting the available training offer to the domains in which teachers feel the greatest need for improvement in specific skills and knowledge.
- III. The investment in creating tailored training offers, carried out in the school context, proved important, contributing to overcoming some resistance and, simultaneously, to combating a tendency of many teachers to work in isolation, by stimulating sharing, dialogue, and the concrete exercise of collaboration practices.
- IV. The creation and dynamization of networks and micro-networks between and within schools, organized by themes or disciplinary areas, seems to constitute a good practice that should be consolidated and disseminated, with ACF Representatives playing a decisive role in this regard.
- V. The organization of seminars, meetings, and showcases of good practices were identified as important moments of recognition and encouragement for the pursuit of the changes proposed by the ACF, which also provide relevant moments of learning and sharing of good practices, common problems, and challenges, involving principals and teachers, but also allowing the introduction of external perspectives, with the invitation to participate from experts and trainers.

- VI. The importance of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), through the co-financing of the Human Capital Operational Programme (POCH), which initially supported the establishment of Regional Support Teams, as well as the reinforcement of continuous training for teachers and principals, and the implementation of institutional capacity-building actions (e.g. meetings and seminars), proved to be highly relevant in the effort to disseminate this educational policy to all national public schools, as well as in consolidating the organizational changes associated with DL 55/2018.
- VII. The National Program for the Promotion of School Success (PNPSE), the Ciência Viva Science Clubs in Schools, the National Arts Plan (PNA), the 21|23 School+ Plan, the School Libraries Network (RBE), the National Reading Plan 2024 (PNL 2024), the Eco-Schools, the Ubuntu, the Youth Parliament, among other programs and projects, stand out as factors that positively influenced the changes in school results and the quality of learning.
- VIII. Finally, the role of principals, when aligned with the challenges proposed by the ACF, proves to be a decisive element in creating, from an institutional perspective, the most favourable conditions for the emergence and development of more flexible and innovative pedagogical approaches and practices.

On the other hand, a set of **aspects that negatively condition the implementation of ACF in schools** were identified, which, although some have already been mentioned in previous points, are now systematized:

- I. The difficulties in finding available time for carrying out collaborative work (joint planning, interdisciplinary work, etc.), due namely to the increasing demand and complexity of school interventions and organizational models, as well as for attending training, were certainly the aspects most frequently pointed out by the surveyed teachers.
- II. Teacher training and professional development, particularly in areas such as pedagogical differentiation, pedagogical diversification and active methodologies, curricular articulation, among others, as well as the capacity-building of school leadership, emerge as elements that were also identified as decisive, with the persisting weaknesses at this level equally conditioning the implementation of DL 55/2018 and the continuity and sustainability of the work carried out.
- III. The high instability of the teaching staff in schools, doubly impacted by the departure of teachers due to retirement and the arrival of new teachers who, increasingly, according to the perspective of principals and teachers interviewed in the context of case studies, reveal didactic-pedagogical weaknesses, raising some challenges regarding their full integration into the schools' educational projects.
- IV. The lack of other specialized human resources in schools was identified as a relevant obstacle to the implementation of DL 55/2018.
- V. From an organizational perspective, two negative factors stand out: the excessive bureaucratic burden pointed out by many teachers; and, on the other hand, some obstacles associated with school leadership, which do not favor organizational contexts adjusted to the challenges proposed by the ACF.
- VI. In another aspect, the limitations that, as previously mentioned, exist in terms of more active participation and involvement of students and, above all, parents and guardians, also constitute important obstacles to the full implementation of DL 55/2018.
- VII. Finally, the pressure exerted by national exams, particularly at the secondary education level, conditions the entire school community (principals, teachers, students, parents, and guardians) and constitutes another factor that significantly impacts the full implementation of DL 55/2018.

Regarding the effects of ACF on student learning, the evaluation was not able to produce sufficient evidence to draw definitive conclusions. From the perspective of the impact of Essential Learnings (AE) on the consolidation of learning, positive effects were noted by a significant portion of the surveyed students, although not universally. The collected data point to positive signs in terms of student motivation and engagement, including how they perceive and relate to the school, but also from the perspective of the development of competencies such as autonomy and collaborative work. There is a generalized perception, on the part of principals, teachers, students, and parents, of an improvement in how students learn, associating this trend with the implementation of DL 55/2018. Indeed, most of the surveyed students consider that they can organize their work and study autonomously, as well as report having

improved in group work with peers. Most of the surveyed teachers and principals also agree that ACF has allowed for improving both student learning and the quality of educational success.

Statistically, however, it is not possible to establish a direct effect between the implementation of DL 55/2018 and the improvement of educational success indicators. In fact, **although the positive evolution of retention and dropout rates**, which reveals a general trend of significant reduction in these rates across all educational levels over the past decade, with steeper declines from 2020 onward, may suggest the effectiveness of curricular and pedagogical changes in terms of pedagogical innovation and curricular flexibility prompted by DL 55/2018, it is important to note that the latest PISA test results show a decline in student performance in mathematics, reading, and science (2018 vs. 2022), indicating the **persistence of weaknesses in the consolidation of key competencies**.

From the perspective of the contribution of the implementation of DL 55/2018 to the **promotion of equity, equal opportunities, and the reduction of disparities among students**, the collected elements point to a **moderate positive impact, with visible differences between territorial and socioeconomic contexts and educational cycles**. Although consistent practices that reinforce equity among students have been identified (such as co-teaching in the classroom, intercultural projects, or the valorisation of collaborative work), it is important to recognize that, on the one hand, there is a lack of systematic mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating inequalities in schools, particularly among vulnerable groups, and that, on the other hand, obstacles persist to the full realization of these objectives (limitations linked to the lack of specialized resources, disciplinary issues, instability of the teaching staff, and difficulties associated with the integration of migrant students, etc.).

Finally, regarding the **continuity and sustainability of the approach proposed by DL 55/2018**, the evaluation team concluded that there are some important challenges to be addressed, which are systematized as follows:

- I. The consolidation and, above all, the continuity of the changes implemented in schools in recent years, even with differentiated levels of appropriation, depend decisively on the creation of organizational conditions that sustain the implemented practices, such as the stability of pedagogical teams, the existence of time dedicated to planning and collaborative work, the reinforcement of formative support, and the provision of resources adapted to the needs of teachers (including the reinforcement of specialized human resources).
- II. The future sustainability of ACF is also associated with its institutional valorisation within the framework of educational policy and the ability of schools to integrate it as an effective regular practice rather than an episodic one. In this sense, the importance of knowledge sharing, the development of networks and micro-networks, and the valorisation and broad communication of good pedagogical practices and innovative projects developed in different schools, which constitute a stimulus and an example to be followed by others, should be highlighted. Partnerships established with higher education institutions in the field of Education also deserve reinforcement, with a view to expanding spaces and opportunities for knowledge sharing and specialized technical support for schools.
- III. On the other hand, it is noted that there is a lack of mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the changes introduced by DL 55/2018 at the local, regional, and national levels. It is therefore important to improve the existing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, which are excessively quantitative, by introducing other types of indicators, of a more qualitative nature, that allow for a more complete and integrated reading of the dynamics of transformation and innovation, particularly in didactic-pedagogical terms, triggered by ACF, as well as the quality of collaborative work carried out by students and teachers.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations closely align, in terms of their rationale, with the main conclusions presented in the previous chapter. The Final Evaluation Report provides further specification regarding the evaluation conclusion(s) that underpin each recommendation, as well as the intended recipient(s) and more detailed notes on their possible implementation.

R1. Systematize and share successful experiences and practices in the appropriation of the principles of curricular autonomy and flexibility, both at the school and classroom levels. Among other concrete proposals, emphasis is placed on organizing regular meetings dedicated to curricular reorganization and flexibility, the development of active methodologies, and the implementation of formative assessment practices tailored to student diversity, creating formal spaces for sharing among schools and teachers.

R2. Systematize and share successful reorganization practices among different schools and contexts at the regional and national levels, enhancing the role of educational teams and their participation in various levels of school management and collaboration. Concrete operational proposals include promoting working meetings and seminars between school leadership and intermediate structures to disseminate effective practices for flexible school scheduling, the organization of interdisciplinary teams, and the functioning of educational teams, thereby strengthening articulation and collaborative management.

R3. Consolidate time and space for collaborative and interdisciplinary practices (horizontal articulation), making these practices regular and sustainable so that pedagogical innovation does not depend on isolated initiatives or specific contexts. To operationalize this recommendation, it is proposed to institutionalize specific moments for collaborative teacher work, including shared schedules, integrated projects, and joint planning, ensuring the systematic development and monitoring of transversal competencies.

R4. Establish formal conditions that promote opportunities for joint work among teachers, institutionalizing common times for training and collaboration among educators and strengthening structured mechanisms for communication and coordination between teachers across different years and educational cycles (vertical articulation). The study and implementation of formal conditions that address the lack of time for collaboration—such as common time slots, additional human resources, periodic planning meetings, and structured mechanisms for integrating and supporting new teachers—will enable the operationalization of this recommendation.

R5. Consolidate the work developed in defining Essential Learnings (AE). In this regard, it is important to ensure continuous articulation with the ongoing AE revision process, while simultaneously reinforcing the institutional and training mechanisms that guarantee their consistent and sustained application in schools.

R6. Minimize factors that induce heterogeneity in the implementation of ACF across different educational cycles, particularly by managing the effects of external assessments and strengthening vertical curricular alignment practices.

R7. Increase the involvement of experts and specialists in school and curriculum management and enhance strategies for integration and articulation with other existing measures, programs, and initiatives in schools, recognizing them as favourable spaces for achieving the objectives underlying DL 55/2018. To this end, it is recommended that experts in school and curriculum management regularly participate in strategic meetings with the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, AFC National Coordination and Regional Teams, while also reinforcing the integration of ACF into programs such as the National Program for the Promotion of School Success (PNPSE), National Arts Plan (PNA), School Libraries Network (RBE), National Reading Plan 2027 (PNL 2027), and Ciência Viva Science Clubs in Schools.

R8. Encourage the development of strategies and dynamics that foster a collaborative and participatory culture within the school community, with particular attention to increasing family involvement in the educational process. This includes valuing their role in implementing measures, projects, and initiatives related to ACF, while also actively engaging other local community entities and networks. To operationalize this, it is proposed to enhance family and community participation through diverse communication strategies, co-education practices, and the promotion of successful school-family articulation experiences, thereby consolidating a participatory culture.

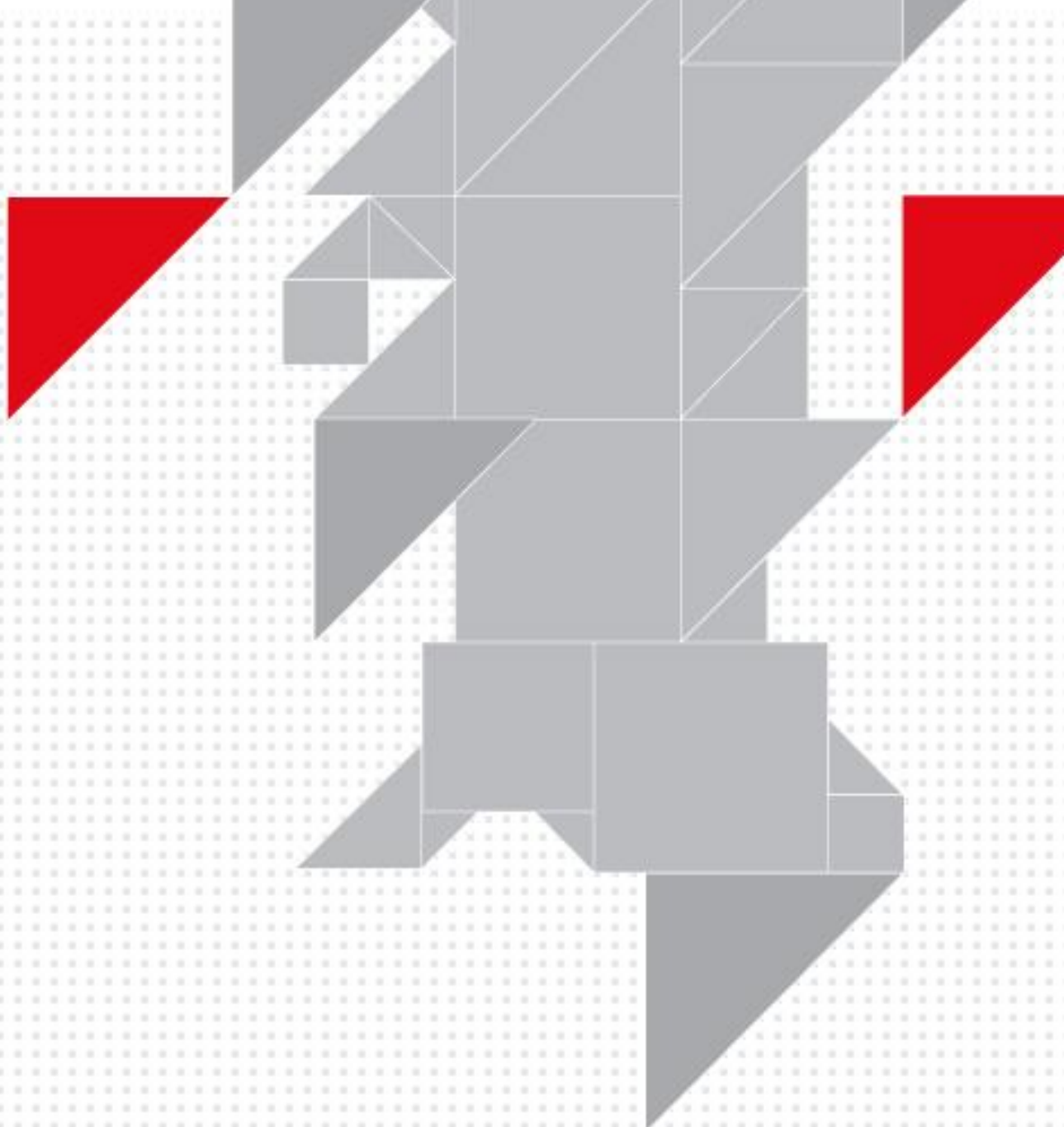
R9. Increase active student participation, both at the school and classroom levels. To operationalize this recommendation, it is proposed to encourage student involvement in consultative bodies and curricular decisions, reinforcing methodologies that grant them greater protagonism, such as project-based work or co-constructed Curricular Autonomy Domains (DAC), as well as individualized support practices and the creation of learning spaces outside the classroom.

R10. Strengthen mechanisms for promoting inclusion, diversity, and equity in schools. This includes creating dissemination and monitoring mechanisms for innovative practices that foster inclusion and equity, particularly in school networks and communities of practice, and developing specific strategies for secondary education that align exams, pedagogical differentiation, and individualized support.

R11. Implement a monitoring system that provides a comprehensive overview of the operationalization and implementation of ACF across its differentiated critical dimensions. To this end, it is proposed to establish a national monitoring system that collects local and regional information on participation, inclusion, performance of vulnerable groups, effects of Essential Learnings (AE), student well-being, and the impact of Teacher Training Centres (CFAE) training, combining quantitative and qualitative indicators.

R12. Enhance the effectiveness and relevance of situated and contextualized continuous training—that is, training aligned with the educational project under development in each school—ensuring that all stakeholders (teachers, technical staff, intermediate teams, and principals) have access to relevant training. This training should be coherently integrated into the school’s annual plan. Concrete proposals include creating regular opportunities for situated training aligned with the educational project, focusing on areas such as pedagogical management, leadership, teacher collaboration, and innovative curricular practices, while also promoting short-duration training sessions in the school context dedicated to methodological diversification and Essential Learnings (AE) analysis.

R13. Strengthen financing mechanisms to support investment in critical areas for the consolidation of DL 55/2018, such as capacity-building and professional development, as well as the valorisation, systematization, and sharing of successful practices at both the school and classroom levels.



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