



## INCASI Policy Brief

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*Challenges in Secondary Level Graduation  
in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires. Inputs for  
decision-making*

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## *Challenges in Secondary Level Graduation in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires. Inputs for decision-making*

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### 1. Introduction

In the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA), Argentina, universal primary education has been almost fully achieved, and access to secondary education has increased significantly. The implementation of the National Education Law No. 26,206 and the consequent obligatory nature of education until the end of secondary school has allowed previously excluded social sectors to access this educational level (Kessler, 2014 and Di Piero, 2018).

However, inequalities persist in the opportunities for graduation at this level, influenced by factors such as social class of origin, gender, the geographical location where students live, and the modality of the school (baccalaureate, commercial, and technical) (Steingberg, 2013 and Boniolo & Lemos, 2024). In this framework, several studies have characterized the Argentine education system as segmented (Braslavsky, 2019), fragmented (Tiramonti, 2004), or segregatory (Veleda, 2009).

Likewise, although the secondary educational offer has expanded, this expansion has not always been accompanied by effective retention policies. Low retention levels, especially in the first year of secondary school, and academic achievement problems have resulted in low graduation rates, disproportionately affecting students from lower-income households (García de Fanelli, 2014) in conjunction with the problems of dropout and school lag for the working classes (Boniolo and Najmias, 2018).

In addition, this situation is differential depending on the type of school where young people go since, for example, the commercial and technical modalities - with respect to high schools - have higher rates of repetition and dropout (Austral, 2019) although, however, the technical modality substantially improves the obtaining of quality occupational positions and access to higher education for people with working-class origins (Sosa, 2019 and Lemos, 2023).

From the analysis of a probabilistic survey by the AMBA (Class and Class Training Survey, ECyFC, IIGG UBA-

ICO UNGS, 2023) of our research team, we have obtained guidelines that allow us to think of recommendations to improve the graduation of the secondary level within the framework of class, territorial and gender inequalities, taking into account the specificities of each educational modality.

### 2. Guidelines and findings

Our studies analyze the probabilities of graduation according to social and territorial variables, with special attention to the modality of secondary school (baccalaureate, technical and commercial). It is observed that:

- A. **Modalities:** Despite the fact that the local literature shows greater graduation problems for commercial and technical schools, the statistical analysis does not show a pure effect of the modality on the chances of completing secondary school, but rather differential ways of dealing with social and territorial inequalities.
- B. **Social classes:** Although the working classes are the ones who have increased their participation in the level the most, they are the ones who have the least chance of completing compulsory education. However, among the children of blue-collar workers who chose trade or technical schools, these inequalities tend to decrease.
- C. **Gender:** Women are more likely to graduate, possibly due to increased female educational participation and the tendency to postpone motherhood. However, in technical modalities, the male graduation rate is still higher.
- D. **Age cohorts:** Younger cohorts are more likely to graduate, which could reflect recent education policies and expanding access. Despite this, the data show a slight decrease in graduation opportunities when considering only those who start secondary education. This result would be showing that retention continues to be a strong problem for schools. However, the commercial modality and especially the technical modality show to receive a lower impact of this problem.

E. **Territory (geographical location of the students' housing):** The probabilities of graduation not only vary within the AMBA, but the territory turns out to be the variable with the greatest explanatory weight in the statistical models. Students closer to the City of Buenos Aires are more likely to complete secondary school, which underscores territorial inequality. This guideline is transversal to all educational modalities, although it has a slightly lower impact on technical schools.

### 3. Recommendations

A. **Expand the offer in the territory:** expand the offer of secondary schools easily accessible with the public transport network, thinking about the articulation between primary and secondary schools so that families with several school-age children can schedule their routines in the school year.

B. **Territorial anchors of schools:** to develop tools that allow reflection on the relationship between schools and the training they offer, and the socio-productive systems of the territories in which they are located. This will facilitate the articulation of possible trajectories between secondary education and the local labor market.

C. **Strengthen school retention:** It is crucial to implement policies that not only expand access, but also promote school retention, especially in the first years of secondary school and in areas further away from the City of Buenos Aires, such as the second and third cordons of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. Extracurricular accompaniment in the areas of Language and Mathematics could function as a mechanism that levels opportunities at the level and strengthens promotion between cycles.

D. **School monitoring:** It is necessary for schools to implement mechanisms that allow them to follow the family trajectories of students in vulnerable situations in order to be able to resort to state policies and programs in times of family crisis.

E. **Policies to support young people:** sustain and support the application of state subsidies for the purchase of school supplies, textbooks, the improvement of technological equipment in schools and the purchase of notebooks for digital literacy not only for students but also for their families.

F. **Encourage equity in educational modalities:** While alternative modalities (technical and commercial) are challenging in terms of family expenses, they can also function as effective strategies for educational mobility. It is important to ensure that these modalities receive the same level of support and resources as the baccalaureate.

G. **Rethinking the logic of the baccalaureate:** It is necessary to investigate what are the institutional mechanisms of the alternative modalities (technical and commercial) in order to think about the programs, curricular logics and school practices that function as bridges that allow better support for social and territorial inequality.

H. **Develop autonomous students:** the school must develop autonomous thinking skills, providing study tools for the realization of specific topics, with a view to deepening abstraction in texts and logical-mathematical thinking in order to guarantee educational continuity at the higher level

I. **Consider the gender and territorial perspective in policymaking:** Policies must be adapted to the specific characteristics of the neighborhood environment and its problems, taking into account gender and territorial realities, ensuring that all students have equitable opportunities to graduate.

J. **Strengthen educational infrastructure:** Improve the infrastructure of schools in the second and third belts of the AMBA and in more peripheral areas, ensuring that students have access to an adequate learning environment that is well connected by the transport network.

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